

























AN HUNDRED-FOLD;

OR,

MRS. BELMONT'S HARVEST.

BY

MRS. SUSAN M. GRIFFITH.

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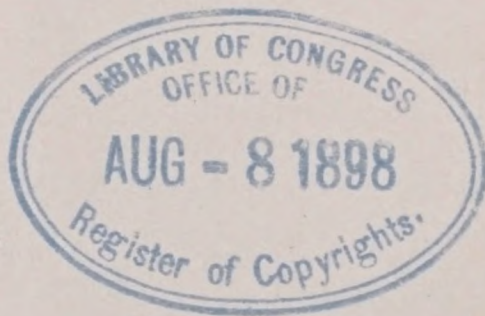
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# AN HUNDRED-FOLD;

OR,

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## CHAPTER I.

### *THE BELMONT FAMILY.*

IT was a cold, rainy evening in November. The pavements were slippery with sleet, and the street lamps flickered uncertainly in the wind which blew in fitful gusts around the street corners and down the wide avenue of the pretty college town of Oakland. The few pedestrians upon the streets hurried on under their streaming umbrellas, wrapped in silence, barely speaking as they passed their acquaintances, and the brilliantly-lighted stores and places of entertainment bade fair to be left desolate. The dwelling-houses were fast closed against the storm, the shutters being drawn and every slat closed, that not a ray of the warm light within might lose itself in the outer darkness.

There was an exception, however, on Rose street in the form of a story-and-a-half cottage with a bay window, in which were stored a multitude of choice plants in full bloom. There



were no shutters to this house, and the curtains were drawn aside, seemingly on purpose to let the rich glow of the coal fire, combined with the blaze of a large hanging lamp, stream out in welcome radiance to the weary plodders through the rain. Certain it was that more than one eye was caught by the cheery, home-like interior, and more than one poor pedestrian sighed and wished that he had reached his stopping-place, and that the cozy nest he could look into so freely was his own. In the dining-room the light was bright, too, and through the generous window one could see the supper-table spread with the whitest of cloths and the daintiest of dishes, to which a young girl of eighteen or nineteen years of age was putting the finishing touches with a skilful hand and a business-like air that bespoke the domestic artist.

This handsome, cozy house on Rose street belonged to the Belmont family. The children had all been born in it, and would have cried out at leaving it for any other home. Mr. George Belmont was a minister, and the devoted pastor of Westminster Church, Oakland. He had been called there when a young man, and had been there ever since. He had married "the sweetest girl in Oakland," and three years before our story opens, just such a dark, rainy November day as this, he had laid her in the cemetery, and, with a bursting heart, had given her back to God. Since then Kate, his oldest daughter, had kept house for him and cared for the children with an energy and an ability which was surprising, and the church



folks grew fond of saying that the "Doctor never need to think of marrying again." So secure did his flock rest in this belief that his frequent absences to his native city excited no comment, especially as his aged mother still lived there, and required his frequent attention. He had been absent now for some weeks on account of the perilous sickness of his parent, and the pulpit was supplied by a student from a neighboring university by the name of Arthur Percival, and who stayed with the Belmonts from Saturday evening until Monday morning of each week.

It was Saturday evening, the night of which I write, and Kate was expecting him, together with her brother Harold. He always came up on the evening train and stopped at McMillen's store, where Harold clerked, on his way to the house, and came home with him.

Kate was a most excellent housekeeper. Everything was always in perfect order, from the garret windows to the children's shoes and stockings; but even she put on some extras for company, and Mr. Percival was a favorite guest.

Looking closely at Kate, we see a tall, graceful girl with very black hair and eyes, smart-looking and rather handsome, with any amount of "push" in her, and but little of the tenderness and gentleness for which her sex is famous. There is an habitual little frown, too, between the eyes, as if she were not altogether pleased with life in all its features, and would enjoy changing things to her own standard if she could. But her energy and real worth are



so much to be admired that the manifest unpleasantness of face is soon forgotten.

Harold, the oldest brother, is the opposite of Kate, fair and pleasant-faced, whose gentle manners make him a general favorite with one and all; in fact, he is a popular young man, as he most certainly deserves to be.

Ward comes next, a boy of sixteen, as slow in motion as Harold and Kate are active, rather cynical in looks and actions, and possessed of a proud, reserved, and almost secret manner. His dusky black eyes have passionate depths in them that make one shudder, and his head of thick black hair, which never seems to have formed a very extensive acquaintance with the brush and comb, has a somewhat ferocious appearance. One need not be in the house a very long time in order to perceive that he is the "black sheep of the family," "the most provoking boy in the world" to Kate, the tease and torment of the younger children, and his father's chief source of anxiety.

Then there is Mamie, a sweet-faced and very pretty little girl of ten; brown-eyed, brown-haired, and brown-faced, who rejoices in the fact that she "looks just like papa." Mamie is a good child; gets the best grades at school, belongs to the Junior Young People's Society, and never has to be told to study her Sunday-school lesson. Besides this, she is tidy and useful at home, and helps Kate in the house-keeping much more than the older sister is willing to acknowledge.

Last on the list is Master George Brown Belmont, commonly called Brownie, a four-year-



old baby in kilts. Brownie is the acknowledged beauty of the family, and the prettiest child on Rose street. Not a house on the street can produce a boy or girl with Brownie's long, shimmering, golden curls, and eyes of heavenly blue, and a look in them such as angels wear. Nowhere is there such a rosy, dimpled face, such a bewitching smile, and such a pair of tempting lips. They say that he is the image of the mother who sleeps in the quiet cemetery, and, of course, he is the special pet, though Kate is not in the habit of petting anybody, but believes in showing her affection by "taking care of them."

This particular Saturday night in November, the two children had been duly bathed, dressed in their good clothes, and established before the fire to occupy themselves in studying deportment, while Kate busied herself in dining-room and kitchen in getting up a good supper, something in which she took a special pride. The bread-baskets on the table held brown and white bread of her own making. The canned fruit, jelly, and jam she had put up without one bit of help; the chocolate cake and ambrosia she had made that very afternoon, and the odor of escalloped oysters and boiling coffee from the little kitchen just beyond were enough to delight the heart of any fastidious lady or gentleman. As for the two children ensconced before the fire, one in his little cushioned rocker, the other on a hassock very near him, the smell of the good things made them nearly wild.

"We're hungry, ain't us, Mamie?" sighed the



small boy, looking fixedly into the fire, and shaking his golden head soberly.

"I should say so," replied Miss Mamie, trying to peer into the dining-room, and tumbling off the hassock in the attempt. "I'm just about starved."

"I wish't Kate would give us some bread to eat," said Brownie in a low voice. "Sometimes she does. Once she gived us a cinnamon roll, and didn't us eat it up quick, Mamie?"

"I guess we did. Say, Brownie, let's slip out and take a look at the table, will you?"

"Well, lets," said the little boy eagerly.

"Don't make a speck of noise," cautioned Mamie, walking on tip-toe and making sure that Kate was nowhere to be seen. "There, Brownie, isn't that splendid? That's ambrosia in that big glass dish. And see those lady-fingers and those cranberry tarts? Aren't they nice?"

"Oh, oh, Ma-mie!" breathed, rather than spoke the baby, "such boo-ti-ful cake. Couldn't I have dess a leetle, tiny bit?"

"No, no! mustn't touch," whispered the little girl, putting her hands resolutely behind her, and walking around and around the table, describing each article as she passed to her devoted little follower. Round and round they went, until Brownie, forgetting everything in the rapture of the moment, burst out with a delighted squeal, which immediately brought Kate to the door.

"Children," said she, in an irritated tone, "didn't I tell you to sit down and behave yourselves? Now, go straight out of the dining-room



as quick as you can march. Mamie, *you* ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Kate's cross," whispered the little girl, going reluctantly back to her seat by the fire, followed by Brownie, hanging his curly head on one side as he did when reproved. "We were not doing one mite of harm—not one speck."

"No," echoed Brownie, sitting down in his little rocker disconsolately. "I didn't take a bit of cake, did I, Mamie? or 'broisia eiver?"

"Of course you didn't, sweetie; I guess not, then; and I never so much as touched the tablecloth. I do wish Kate wasn't so cross."

"Maybe it makes her cross to make the 'broisia and choc'late cake and cramberry tarts," suggested Brownie thoughtfully.

"Oh, it *don't!*" exclaimed Mamie impatiently. "She's just hateful, that's all."

"When we grow up to be big mens we won't be hateful, will us, Mamie?" queried the boy. "We'll give our little hungry girl and boy a great big piece of cake to eat, and—and a whole orange, when they have to sit by the fire in their good clothes; won't us, Mamie?"

"Yes, we will; but there comes Ward. I know he'll catch it, because he didn't come in time to do the chores. I heard Kate splitting kindlings and bringing in wood and water quite a while ago."

"Halloa, Gold-locks and Dame Durden! What are you hugging the fire for? Coal's too expensive for you to be monopolizing it after this fashion. Skip over to the other side and give a fellow a chance to get dry. It's raining cats and dogs, and I left my umbrella



over to Jud's. Where's Kate, Mame, and how's supper? I'm in the very last stages of starvation. Go out and get me something to eat, Midget; there's an angel."

"Oh! I daresn't," replied Mamie. "Kate's cross, and you didn't come in time to do the chores, you know."

"The chores be—oh! *suspended!*" said Ward, with a wicked grimace and a mischievous pull of Brownie's curls. "What you got on your best bib and tucker for, kid?"

"Why, don't you know?" said Mamie. "Mr. Percival is coming, and we always put on our good clothes for him."

"We're going to have 'brosia and choc'late cake for supper, Wardie; ain't us, Mamie? If you're good, maybe Kate 'll give you some; *maybe* she will," said Brownie.

"If all this is the truth," said Ward, "it is perfectly irresistible. I'm going on a foraging expedition;" and rising lazily from his chair, he shuffled across the room, the mud dropping from his extremely dirty shoes at every step. "Halloa!" as his eyes rested on the handsomely-spread table. "Kate's got up a dandy spread for the Rev. Solemncholy, hasn't she? Here goes for the enemy's rations." And he reached out his arm across the table, clad as it was in a very wet and much-soiled coat-sleeve, and seized a slice of cake, a banana, a pickle and a piece of cheese just as Kate appeared in the doorway.

"Ward Belmont, if you ain't the meanest boy I ever saw in all my life!" she exclaimed, springing forward. "Put that cake right



straight back and get out of here. I'm going to tell father how you act, young man! I never did see such a mean, contemptible being as you are."

For answer, Ward bit a great piece out of the cake and held the remnant aloft tauntingly, at the same time managing to pull the hair-pins out of her hair, thereby letting the whole heavy mass fall in disorder about her shoulders. "If you only knew how pretty and interesting you look, Kate, my dear," said he, mockingly, "you would spend your time admiring yourself in the mirror. The angelic sweetness of your sisterly countenance is enough to challenge an artist's skill."

"Oh, get out!" said Kate, almost beside herself with anger. "You are certainly the hate-fullest boy that ever was born into this world. Just do look at yourself—what a perfect sight you are! tramping around in the mud all this blessed afternoon, and then coming in on my clean carpets. And I had all the Sunday kindlings to split, too, and water to bring, and everything. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I know I ought, my sweet-tempered sister, but nature has denied me the boon of that sensation. If I could be ashamed, I would, if only to reward you for manifesting such a meek, Christian spirit." Then, as footsteps sounded in the hall, he leisurely helped himself to another piece of cheese, and stood directly in front of the blazing fire, causing his damp clothing to steam in a most unpleasant and forbidding manner.



Casting upon him a perfectly furious look, Kate left the room to receive her guest. She had not enough self-control or deceit to enable her to wreath her lips in smiles when war was raging in her heart; so it was with an altogether annoyed countenance that she received him. However, Mr. Percival was a young man who was used to being extremely cheerful himself, and he did not seem to mind Kate's rather dark looks, but sat down with Brownie on one knee and Mamie on the other, and made himself positively fascinating in the limited space of ten minutes.

So sweet and genial was his influence, that when at last they were seated at the tea-table Kate felt better and the clouds which had darkened her face fled before the healthful sunshine of her guest and his cheery conversation.

"And when have you heard from your father, Miss Katie?" asked the young minister during the course of the meal. "I trust he will be coming home soon. I am a little afraid his congregation will get tired of their supply."

"I don't think there is any danger," she returned. "They seem well enough satisfied. Papa will not come while grandma needs him. He is all the son she has left, you know. *Don't, Ward!*" as that young gentleman reached for the coffee-pot.

"Then will the angel of the household be so condescending and kind and all that's uncommon as to pour her erring brother another cup of nectar? I congratulate you upon your influence, Mr. Percival. Kate is always so sweet when you are here."



"That'll do, Ward," said Kate's oldest brother kindly, trying to cover the girl's evident embarrassment. "It is just as Kate says, Mr. Percival; papa feels that grandma will not live long, and he must devote himself to her while he can. He feels sorry that he has to leave his charge this way, but I know he is particularly well pleased with his substitute. This is good coffee, Ward. I don't wonder you asked for a second cup. We are a little proud of Kate's ability as a cook, Mr. Percival."

"You certainly have reason to be," returned the young minister. "How did you come out with that young Harris that you and I were so much interested in? Did you get him to promise to come into the Sabbath-school?"

"He told me he would be there to-morrow without fail," said Harold. "He will go in Ward's class. I will see that he is duly introduced."

"Ward hasn't got any class," said that young man, rising from the table as he spoke. "He's graduated."

"Come to think of it, you were not there last Sunday," said Mr. Percival. "What's amiss?"

"Other pressing engagements," said Ward, going out and shutting the door after him. The next minute they heard the hall-door slam, and Harold said anxiously: "I do wonder where Ward goes to every night?" To which Brownie made answer, "Oh, over to Jud's, I 'spect."

At an early hour Mr. Percival retired to his room, pleading his Bible lesson and sermon as an excuse, and the children being safely tucked



away for the night, Harold and Kate were left alone. Then it was that he took from his pocket a letter, and handing it to his sister with an uneasy smile, said: "Kate, I couldn't tell you before Mr. Percival, but I got a letter from father to-day."



## CHAPTER II.

### *THE LETTER.*

“**Y**OU got a letter from father!” exclaimed Kate, a jealous light creeping into her eyes. “Why, how’s that? he wrote to you the last time, and this time he should have written to me. I think you’re smart, anyway, sitting here the entire evening with a letter from father in your pocket, when you know how anxious I’ve been about him the whole week. As if Mr. Percival’s being here made any difference.”

“It might make a very great difference just now,” returned Harold, looking troubled. “There are some things a family likes to keep to themselves, and this is one of them. The letter is for all of us, of course, but it is addressed to me, probably because it is something of a business letter. Anyway, there are some important items in it. Grandma is dead and buried, for one thing.”

“I don’t see that we can make a secret of that,” said Kate, spitefully. “There’s been no foul play about her death, or anything disgraceful, that you should keep people in the dark about it. I suppose he’ll be home pretty soon then,” rattling the sheets of letter paper a little savagely, as she opened them and made ready to read.

“Yes,” said Harold, with a sigh, “now dear grandma is gone to her rest, there is really nothing to keep him, except—”



"Except what," asked Kate, suspiciously.

Harold turned uneasily away. He did not seem to fancy meeting his sister's eye. "Well," said he at last, "there is a little matter which may detain him a while. The fact of the matter is, Kate, he is not coming alone."

"Not coming *alone*!" repeated Kate in amazement. "Who in the world is there to come with him? I don't know of anybody."

"Read the letter and see," said Harold.

"I won't do any such thing," replied the obstinate girl, throwing the letter on the table in a very bad temper. "You have just got to tell me now what it all means. Who is coming home with father? Who is there to come?"

"Please excuse me, sister," said the young man gently. "I do not want to tell you. I would much rather the letter should speak for itself. I am sorry now that I said one word."

"But as you did, you must go on with it," persisted the inexorable girl. "I haven't patience to read anything now. Besides, it's *your* letter, not mine," with another jealous spark from her eye.

"Well, then, if you will have it without one word of preparation, you must bear the consequences. The individuals who are coming home with father are three in number, viz.: his wife and her two children, a girl and a boy. Now, you have the whole of it. And perhaps you will be good enough to understand why I didn't care to have Percival around when the truth first broke upon you. I expected a scene, for I knew how it would make you feel."

For a moment the girl stood perfectly motion-



less, gazing at her brother with a stony, bewildered gaze, as if she had hardly comprehended his statement; then, snatching up the letter she had thrown down in her heat, she cried out: "It is untrue, every word of it, Harold Belmont! Father marry again, and without letting me know a single thing about it! I never will believe it, though you take your solemn oath it is so."

A look of tender compassion swept over the fine face of her brother as he rose from his chair and wound an arm about the excited girl. "I knew how it must go with you, Kate, dear," said he; "I knew it would cut you to the heart; that it would wound you more deeply than any of us. But I must have you believe it. It is cruel to shut your eyes to the truth, however painful it may be. I assure you it is no falsehood; no made-up story, no idle report. It is written there in black and white in our father's well-known handwriting; and we cannot deny, Kate, that he has a perfect right to do exactly as he pleases. Let us begin by being reasonable; let us try to be willing that this lady may be a blessing to us, and in some sense, as far as she can, let us be willing that she should fill our angel mother's place."

Well as Harold knew his sister Kate, he was totally unprepared for the terrible result of his pacific words. She was angry before, but now she was in a rage. She could find no words in which to clothe her fury, but called her brother hard names, stamped her feet, shrieked, and even spat at him in her impotence. At last tears came to her relief, and she sobbed out:



"I never would have believed it, Harold Belmont! I never would have thought you would so soon have forgotten your own dear mother, and become willing, actually willing, that her place in this home should be filled by a stranger—an interloper, a mean, contemptible step-mother. I always did hate a step-mother, and I never will consent to her coming here; that's settled. It never *shall* be!"

Harold smiled and bit his lip. "My blessed sister," he remonstrated, "do be reasonable. Take time to think the matter over, and you will see it very much as I do, I think. Resistance is worse than useless. It is not that I have ceased to love and honor the sacred memory of our own precious mother, but that I understand that father has an indisputable right to do as he likes, and it would be utter folly for me to raise the least objection. I do not want to give you the impression that I like this movement of his; that would not be true. I do not like it, but I can't help it, and I might as well learn to bear it philosophically. Besides, dear sister, there is still another reason why we should not resent the coming home of our father's second wife. Aside from such a course making everything disagreeable in the extreme, it would be very far from pleasing to our divine Master, and we are both his professed followers, you know."

"The idea!" contemptuously exclaimed Kate. "I should hate religion if I thought as you do. The Lord Jesus Christ don't expect any such things of us; and I shan't do it, anyway."

"Does not the Lord Jesus expect of us the



fruits of his Spirit?" asked Harold, solemnly. "What are they, Kate, dear? Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. Is there anything in that whole grand list to call for such a resolution as you have given voice to? Oh, dear sister, for Jesus' sake, for papa's sake, for all our sakes, for your own, think twice before you determine on such a course of action."

"You needn't waste your breath," said Kate; "I am of age; I presume I can do as I please."

"Very well," said Harold; "suppose you read the letter; it is getting late."

"I'm in no hurry," sullenly responded Kate. "If that's what's in it I don't care to read it."

"Let me read it to you, then," said her brother, gently. "It is a good letter and a most affectionate one. I think it will make you feel better."

"DAYTON, *November 5, 18—.*

"MY DEAR CHILDREN: You will be much grieved, I know, to learn of your dear grandma's death. She passed away on the Sabbath just at the dying of the day. It was a blessed release from the pain and constant suffering of many years. Her last hours abounded in expressions the most fervent on the love of Christ. She gave the most beautiful evidence of an abundant entrance into the kingdom, and I would not bid her leave the glories of heaven for a continued residence on earth were it in my power to do so. She left many sweet messages for you. I cannot commit them to writing, but in some of our quiet, hallowed, twilight



hours I will try to tell you all the sweet things she said, and I know that you will hide them in the secret chambers of your hearts as some of the precious things to be remembered forever.

“I have not time for a lengthy letter this time, my dears, for I am kept very busy in settling up grandma’s affairs, and time presses; but I have something to communicate which cannot on any account be put off or laid aside. First, let me ask pardon for taking you so by surprise. I had not meant to do this, but circumstances having hastened matters, I have been obliged to act without conferring with you.

“About a year ago, while upon one of my frequent visits to your grandma, it was my privilege to renew my acquaintance with an estimable lady whom I knew in my youth, and after much careful consideration and taking it to the Lord in prayer, I came to the conclusion to ask her to supply the place made vacant by your dear mother. She is a widow with two children, a girl of fourteen and a boy of ten. I have prevailed upon her to consent to a speedy marriage, as it has already been delayed some time on account of mother’s long illness, and I am very anxious to get home once more and settled down to work in my own parish. We will probably be with you the latter part of next week. It is somewhat sudden, to be sure, but I have so much confidence in Katie’s superior housekeeping that I have no fears as to the order of our reception.

“Mrs. Taylor’s daughter, Elinor, is, I regret to say, quite an invalid, being somewhat crip-



pled in her left limb. She is, of course, disposed to be a trifle nervous, and I think, Kate, it will be necessary for you to let her have your room, as it is in the most quiet part of the house, and you can take the two little ones and occupy mine. You can put my bed in the sitting-room; it is a large room, and will do very well for the present. Our quarters will necessarily be pretty close, but we will all be glad to put up with it, I hope, for the blessing of having this dear mother at the head of the household.

“And now, I do not think it necessary for me to ask for a welcome to be given to these new relatives whom I am to bring home to you, is it? They are all anxious to be mother, sister and brother to you, and I hope you will extend to them a cordial and a loving greeting. Kiss the little ones for me. And now adieu until we meet with open arms.

“Your father,

“GEORGE BELMONT.”



## CHAPTER III.

### *THE STORM CONTINUES.*

HAROLD laid the letter aside and sat very still, leaning his head wearily upon his hand, and watching his sister to see the result of the communication he had just read.

He knew it was not in her nature to be patient with the unwelcome intelligence. There were several reasons why she, more than any other member of the household, should object to a second mother.

In the first place, Kate was neither a large-hearted nor a warm-hearted individual. She had not room in her affections for many, therefore she did not love many. But those whom she did love were regarded with a kind of passionate feeling which had in it more or less of selfishness. For instance, she felt that her father and brothers and little sister belonged exclusively to her. She rejected instinctively the idea that the world had a claim upon them. They were hers—her very own. She loved them: they needed no one else. Then she could not bear that the other children should be quite so much to her father as she was. Though she was too reserved and dignified to care for petting, still if there was a leisure hour to spare or a confidence to bestow, she expected to be the chosen object of his attention. And perhaps he had spoiled her to some ex-



tent; it was natural he should, she being the oldest daughter, and with her abundant labors had done so well, making his home so comfortable and caring for his motherless babies.

Then we must remember that Kate had reigned as queen over her father's household since the hour of her mother's death, and no one, not even Ward, had disputed her sway for a moment. The children had yielded her as ready an obedience as they did their father. It would cost her such pangs as no tongue could tell to abdicate her sovereignty in favor of another. How could she bear to see a stranger come in and change everything, regardless of her wishes or feelings, and, supplanting her in the affections of her father, and, it might be, the children also, make of her a secondary consideration where she had been chief counsellor and friend. She pictured to herself how her father would forget her; how, wrapped up in his new domestic interests, he would pass her by, and perhaps learn to love his wife's children far better than his own. The thought was bitter. Perhaps if he had known of this bitter thought in time, he would have acted with more forethought and greater wisdom. Dr. Belmont loved his children dearly. He had been devoted to his first wife, and cherished her memory faithfully. But he was an occupied man, so filled with ministerial duties that he had little time to devote to the study of his own family. In the depths of his own heart he really believed that the marriage which he contemplated would prove the greatest of blessings to one and all. Was not Kate an



inexperienced young girl, and was she not loaded with the cares of a large household, when she needed to be free as a bird, to be able to obtain further education, and to engage with other young ladies of her age in society, instead of being tied at home all the time? Then there were the children; they needed a mother's wisdom, and here was this Christian lady, full of the spirit of the Master, who would teach them what Kate had never yet had the means of learning, and give them what they had known very little of—a mother's love. He hoped, too, that she would be a controlling influence to his wayward boy, Ward, that child of many prayers, whom no one had ever understood and managed except the little mother who was now "asleep in Jesus." Besides this, he felt the need of a help-meet in his own peculiar line of life; one who not only had the intellect and the ability, but the Christian heart to sympathize with his labors in behalf of the church and its people. He had felt this need a very long time. In Mrs. Lucia Taylor he believed that he had found the person to supply it in all its fulness. Her strong faith, her active spiritual life, her widespread, powerful influence, her brilliant mind, added to which was a most charming manner, all favored the belief that he had obtained the one who could, better than any other, help him in building up the church of Oakland, in whose present and eternal welfare he was devoted beyond any other earthly interest.

It was not surprising, therefore, that being so well satisfied himself, he should have no



misgivings in regard to the feelings of the little family at home. It seemed to him that Kate must enjoy, like a natural and sensible girl, being released from the tiresome treadmill of housekeeping cares, and also rejoice at the prospect of having another sister much nearer her own age than Mamie, and with these pleasant reflections the reverend gentleman hastened his preparations for his approaching marriage.

For some time after the reading of the letter, Kate sat perfectly still, going over in her mind the great injustice of the injury done her; and then, with a hard, determined look which made Harold's heart sink within him, she arose from her chair, and deliberately began disrobing the room of all the pretty things with which her own and her mother's hands had graced it—tidies, throws and table-scarfs were gathered into a little heap. "There!" she exclaimed, "if that is all my father cares for us, and what we have done for him, he shall never have anything that we have made to remind him of us."

"Kate, you are positively insane!" said her brother, springing to his feet. "How can you carry matters so far and with so high a hand? You will regret this. Put everything back, my love, and sit down here on the sofa by me and talk it all over with your usual good common sense. For pity's sake control yourself. Don't scream out that way and talk so loud. Percival may hear you, and what will he think?"

"I do not care what he thinks!" replied the angry girl; but in spite of her assertion, she did lower her voice, and allowed Harold to draw her down upon the sofa. Then she went



on : "How could he," she said, beating the arm of the sofa with her clenched hand, as if it were the creature deserving of her wrath, and could feel each blow; "how could father treat me like this after I have worked so hard for him all these years, and tried my very best to make everything just as nice and home-like and pleasant, and just as near like mamma used to have it as I possibly could. It is the meanest thing I ever knew a father to do. I feel as though I should hate him for it all my life. That's exactly what it will come to, Harold; I shall hate him, I shall abhor her, and I shall despise her children—the interlopers!"

"O Kate," interposed her brother, "will you never regard your words? Think how very important it is that you should look at this matter in a proper light. Think of your influence over Ward and the children. It will be terrible for father to come home and find no welcome from any of you. I cannot endure the thought of such a state of things. Why not make the best of what you cannot help? His wife is a Christian lady, and there is nothing wrong in his marrying again if he choose. As to hating your father, Kate, that is an absurd thing to say. So good as he has always been—so good as he has meant to be in this. The thing of it is, you love him too well to be able to give him up to another's affection and care. That is the way the case stands, dear sister. After the first shock has worn off, you will feel very different, and in just trying to perform your Christian duty you will become reconciled to the Father's will."



"Oh! don't talk so like a simpleton," said Kate, with an angry stamp of her foot. "I don't believe it is God's will at all, and I wouldn't try to like it if it was. If you've a mind to knuckle down and make the best of it, as you say, of course it is your privilege to do so, but I shan't! I tell you, Harold, I will never endure it. They shall never come. This house shall never be that woman's home. I will find some means to prevent it."

"But, Kate," said her brother once more, "you insist on ignoring the fact that this house belongs to father, and not to you or me."

"I don't care if it does belong to him, it belongs to his children too, and he has no right to give it to anybody else. Just only see how sly he has been. Never lets us know one thing of his intentions until just a day or two beforehand. There's no time to fix things even if I was disposed to do it, and I'm not, of course. She can do her own fixing after she gets here."

Harold gave vent to a little relieved laugh. Kate was coming down. If she once began to think of her work it would set her all right. But the laugh seemed to hurt her afresh. She burst into a flood of tears.

"Papa never once thought of me," she said, "and whether I should enjoy making sacrifices for them or not. The idea of my giving up my room to that girl Elinor. That pretty little room that mamma gave me for my very own."

"Papa's is much the nicer apartment," replied Harold, "and it will be very much more convenient for you. It has been no end of trouble for you to lug Mamie's cot in every



night and set it up. You know you have often said so. Now you won't have to do that any more. Papa's room is plenty large enough to let it remain during the day. I shouldn't worry about that. Father meant no slight to you, Kate. Men don't think about these things like women do. But I think it will be rather inconvenient for him to have his sleeping-room in here," and the young man looked around upon the dainty little apartment with a doleful visage.

"That's another thing!" burst out Kate, tempestuously. "How is it going to look with a bed in the sitting-room?"

Harold threw back his head and laughed again, and this time Kate laughed with him.

"I don't care!" she exclaimed, hysterically, "it's no laughing matter. The idea of a great bed being stuck up here making everything look so common and mean. It'll give everything else away in the room. Oh! dear, why couldn't he have let well enough alone?"

Harold sighed. "I wish he had," he said. "I really do, Kate; and if he had but condescended to ask my advice, I should have begged him to choose some one unencumbered with children. It seems to me that that is the most unpleasant feature in the whole case—the girl and boy. I am dubious how that will work. It is always a very difficult matter for a family composed of different elements to get along harmoniously. About the bed, Kate, couldn't you fix that some way?"

Kate thought hard and painfully. It was such a trial for her to disarrange her well-arranged house. It was not a large one, and



there was, especially, a dearth of sleeping-rooms, but there was a small apartment opening out of her father's study which had always been used as a kind of reception-room for transient callers, especially that kind of callers who desired a private conversation with Dr. Belmont. This apartment might, perhaps, be utilized, and so she suggested to Harold.

"The very thing!" he exclaimed, exultantly.

"I suppose the parlor will be used common enough now," said poor Kate, hopelessly. "It seems like sacrilege to me for strangers to make use of that room where she, our precious, precious mother, lay in her casket."

"It is not," said Harold. "I think I loved mother very dearly, Kate, but I don't feel about her as you do. Mother spent her sweet life in making people happy, and I cannot think she would object to her home being thrown open to the sunshine of human hearts. Perhaps in the light of heavenly wisdom she can look down and bless this union. At any rate, let me beg once more that we may act like our gentle mother's children; let us give them all a pleasant greeting home. Come, say it is a bargain."

Kate's lip curled. "I would rather die this very minute," said she.

Just at this point in affairs, the hall-door swung violently upon its hinges, there was a shuffling of feet, and Ward entered the room.



## CHAPTER IV.

### HOW WARD LOOKED AT IT.

“WHAT’S the row?” asked the intruder, throwing himself into the nearest chair and his leg over the arm. “What has so disturbed the angel of the household as to cause her to be desperate enough to try to drown herself in the briny deep of her own tears? Has the adorable Percival trodden upon her toes and hurt her pet corn, or what has aroused the vials of her wrath? Speak, and let thy servant hear.”

Harold answered by a quick, annoyed motion for his brother to forbear, but Kate, picking up the hated letter, flung it at him with the words: “Read *that* and satisfy yourself to the full, you crazy thing. I have an idea you won’t take it any cooler than I have.”

Ward’s bantering tone and look vanished completely as he recognized the familiar handwriting, and it was with eagerness that he opened the letter and ran his eyes over the contents. Then a fierce, dark, evil look spread like an ominous cloud, in which are hidden the thunders and lightnings of nature’s wrath, over his face, something very much like a curse burst from his lips, and he arose and struck the table a heavy blow with his fist. “As I am a Belmont,” he cried, “I am through with the governor of this ranch. He’s done for himself in my estimation. I consider that he has insulted



both the dead and the living. I'll sever the bond that binds me to him if it takes a thousand years; and if I ever forgive him, may the Lord of heaven and earth never forgive me."

"There!" cried Kate, triumphantly; "what did I tell you? I knew he'd never stand it; I knew that he would look at them as interlopers, just as I do."

"You're right," he returned, his black eyes flashing dangerously; "you're mighty right. And I shall try to create a tropical climate for them, too."

"Don't you wish we could break it up some way?" said Kate. "Suppose we telegraph to papa to defer proceedings until he hears from us; that will give us time to build up a perfect wall of objections."

"Oh, you can't do anything with him now," sneered Ward. "There's no fool so big as an old one, you know. It's too late, chicken, to prevent the thing. The only comfort we can get out of the affair is to torment them like a certain individual who has a character for going about as a roaring, devouring lion. I think something like that would be exactly in my line."

"What is the use in fighting it?" interposed the more pacific Harold. "Of course, you must know that father has everything on his side. Law and gospel both uphold him. It is the height of folly for us to array ourselves against this thing. It will only make us perfectly ridiculous, and give rise to a flood of public scandal. If you will stop and think a minute, you will acknowledge that you do not



want to be town talk any more than myself. Go to work, now, and carry out such plans as you have indicated, and where will you be? You will speedily find that father will choose his wife before he will you, and you will be without an interest in the home. Then what follows? Neither of you have the remotest idea what it costs to take care of one's self without the help of home and friends. You will find that the world is not a lap of luxury and a horn of plenty to the friendless and inexperienced. It is much more like a rod of punishment. Besides," and Harold's voice softened to its accustomed gentleness, "we are not savages, but the children of Christian parents. Kate even goes higher, as I do; she claims, with me, to be a 'child of the King.'"

"There's one thing that I am not liable to forget for a moment," retorted Ward, "and that is, that I am the child of my mother. No one can ever take her place with me, and that any one should try the experiment is enough to set on fire the flames of vengeance forever."

"Ward—dear brother," said Harold, entreatingly, linking an arm into that of the excited lad and walking with him up and down the room, "let me appeal to the good and noble side of your nature. Don't wreck yourself and disappoint those who love you by any false notions of honor. Our mother was the gentlest, most peaceable little woman that ever lived. She would endure anything, sacrifice anything, rather than battle, even for her rights. Believe me, you can never honor her memory in the way you suggest any more than you can



that of the blessed Christ himself. It would grieve her inexpressibly to see you like this. Calm yourself, my dear fellow, and stand by your father, even in what seems to be the mistake of his life."

"Do you mean to stand by him, Hal, in giving another woman our mother's place?" asked Ward, shoving back the long, abundant hair which had a trick of falling over his forehead; "I thought you loved our little mother too well ever to call any other woman by that sacred name."

A wave of intense suffering surged over the face of the elder brother, and the hand on the boy's shoulder trembled visibly, but his voice was calm and unruffled as he replied: "I love her too well, yet, Ward, to turn against the man who was her dearest earthly friend. I will say to you as I said to Kate not an hour ago, that I regret this marriage; but it is something which I cannot interfere with nor avert, and I made up my mind to bow to the inevitable. One thing I am resolved upon, and that is, that I will never, by any means, bring discord into the midst of our family circle. I will endure anything rather than do that. And if Kate and you will only consent to be of the same mind, everything will end all right. Let us trust our heavenly Father to bring it to a successful issue."

"You don't know me," retorted Ward, with a scornful curl of his lip, "you are asking an impossibility."

"Yes, Harold, you are," said Kate. "I feel just that way myself, and though, as you say, I



don't see any way out of the trouble, that just makes it all the worse. I know I shall be mad from one week's end to the other. I never can get over it, and what's more, I am not going to try."

"Then there is just one more thing that I shall endeavor to do," said Harold, firmly; "I dislike such a movement, but I think it is my duty to call in Mr. Percival and ask his advice. His influence shall at least be tried," and with a quick step the young man left the room, leaving Ward and Kate staring at one another in perfect consternation. Running up to Mr. Percival's door, he tapped at it softly.

"Come in," said the pleasant voice of the young minister. "Whenever anybody in this house wants to see me, just let that individual walk right in without a bit of ceremony, and he'll find me all attention. Glad to see you, Harold. Sit down in that arm-chair, and give me some pointers for my sermon."

"Thank you, I haven't a moment to spare. I came up to see if you would step down stairs with me a few moments. The hour is late, I know, but—"

"Most assuredly," replied his guest, laying aside his Bible and manuscript. Then, for the first time catching sight of his friend's face, he exclaimed: "What is the trouble, brother? Has anything occurred to disturb you?"

"I am sorry to say yes," said Harold, in a tremulous voice. "Something quite serious. I am at a loss how to proceed," and he rapidly rehearsed the evening's excitement over the unwelcome letter.



"I wasn't looking for such stubborn resistance," said he, in conclusion. "I knew that Kate would be angry for a time; that is natural enough, but I had no idea but what it would blow over in a little bit, and we should be able to settle everything satisfactorily."

"I am glad that you came to me," said Mr. Percival, reaching for his Bible. "I will just take this friend and counsellor with me. I never like to go anywhere, especially on an errand for the Lord, without the word."

Ward was pacing the floor restlessly still, his arms folded tightly over his breast as if he would prevent his heart from giving forth any tender feeling even if it was disposed to do so, and his shaggy black hair falling over his forehead. The fierceness of his countenance had not abated one jot, but had rather deepened into a fixed resolve. He paid no attention to Mr. Percival when he came in, but continued his restless march up and down the room.

Kate, on the contrary, who was standing by the window looking out into the stormy night, turned as he approached, and, coloring deeply, seated herself and made considerable effort to control her excited feelings.

"I am so sorry," said the young man, with Christian gentleness, "to find you in such serious mental distress; but I feel sure you have not forgotten that there is a way to bear all these things, and that there is an almighty Friend always near to help you."

"O Mr. Percival," said Kate, "I have borne so much, and this is just the drop too much. I cannot bear this, and I don't think it is my duty to try."



"I admit that the lessons of life are hard problems sometimes," returned the young minister; "but I do believe that our great Teacher knows how to educate his pupils, and I don't think it is good to find fault with his methods, Miss Kate. It may be that in the years to come you may be allowed to see why you had to study this page of domestic life."

"Oh! I can't think that the Lord has anything to do with it," said Kate, irritably. "It has just come of itself to torment me."

"Do things come of themselves?" asked the young man, kindly. "It seems to me that either the spirit of good or the spirit of evil attends all the affairs of life, small and great. To the good we should learn to submit, toward the evil we should wear a conqueror's soul; and we know, too, that our Father makes all things, the evil as well as the good, work together for the best good of those who love him. I don't believe I should allow myself to be tormented by this, Miss Kate. I believe I should make up my mind to be happy in spite of it. It can't separate you from the love of Christ, and through his affection you can triumph over everything. Be patient; time will set these things right; it always does. Time is the angel of God, and a great healer. Let us see what there is in the word of God to guide us," and he opened his Bible and turning to the second chapter of Philippians, read the exhortation of the apostle to be of the lowly and unselfish mind of Christ.

"Now," said he, as he finished reading, "I don't think it is necessary to multiply words.



You and Ward know what is right. You recognize the truth that there is for each of you a divine Helper who can make it easy for you to do right. Nothing is lacking, perhaps, but a consecrated will. Let us ask our blessed Jesus to give you that, shall we not?"

Ward did not kneel during the prayer, but he ceased his uneasy tramping up and down the room, and stood quietly and with some little show of respect; then, as soon as the petition came to a close, he seized his hat and leaving the room he opened the hall-door and walked out once more into the stormy night.

With a bitter, desolate cry he wandered through the dismal streets, hurrying up one and down another, until at last he came to where the houses were few and far between, and just ahead there gleamed amid the darkness the cold white shafts of marble, and there sighed the weeping willows and sighing cedars which marked the "city of the dead."

Into this silent, solemn place the boy crept, although the hour was now very late, and through its winding avenues he wandered, until, at last, he paused before a beautiful, well-kept lot with a single grave upon it, just discernible amid the murky darkness. A monument of the finest Italian marble reared its majestic column at the head, an urn with a snow-white dove upon it stood at the grave's foot, and everything bespoke the utmost care and attention. For a moment the boy stood gazing through blinding tears, his whole frame shaking with strong emotion; then, throwing himself upon the cold, damp grave with outstretched arms, he cried



out in the bitterness of his heart: "Oh! mother, mother, if you could but come back to me! No one ever loved me like you; no one ever understood me. You are all I ever had, and I never can, and I never will be, any other woman's boy."



## CHAPTER V.

### *KATE'S FRIENDS ON ROSE STREET.*

KATE BELMONT was a Christian; at least, she was one in name. She was a member of the church in good standing, attended service regularly, and performed every outward duty with punctilious regard. But to her, religion was not living Christ daily, with an earnest desire to apprehend the mind that was in him, and so bring forth the "fruits of the Spirit." It was to her much more like a dream than a reality. She had never looked at it as an armor with which she might defend herself in the battle of life, and resist the fiery darts of the old enemy of souls, but as simply something which she had grown up into, which she held as a sort of a birthright, and which she would not have parted with for anything. She was careful to see that the children learned their Bible verses, but when asked the meaning of them, she told them never to mind, they would probably understand enough about such things when they got large. She heard them say their prayers as a matter of course, but she never talked to them of the blessed Jesus, and how he had opened the kingdom to the children, and loved to take them in his arms when he lived upon the earth, and when they would have put some question to her, she hushed them at once.

If she had only looked at Jesus as a familiar



friend, to whom she could carry the burdens of her sorrows, she would not have done just as she did on Monday afternoon—hurried through her dinner work, and bundling Brownie into his overcoat and cap, locked the house door and hastened to 106 Rose street for consolation in this her time of trouble.

The Ransoms were her special friends. They were old neighbors, and distant relatives of her mother's. Kate had chosen a time when the children were all at school, except Lucy, a young lady of her own age, and as she ran up the steps and pulled the bell, she could see them cozily arranged about the sitting-room fire: Miss Sarah Bush at the sewing-machine, making it hum with all her accustomed energy, Mrs. Ransom putting finishing touches on a new and very handsome dress, and Miss Lucy making buttonholes.

Now, Miss Bush was a sister of Mrs. Ransom's. She was a tall, spare woman of thirty-five or thereabouts, very fond of her own opinion, and also fond of a bit of gossip occasionally. Lucy came to the door and gave Kate a warm welcome. "Where have you been keeping yourself?" she asked, giving her a kiss, and catching Brownie in her arms. "I have been longing to see you for ever so long, but I haven't had the first chance to run over on account of my new dress. Aunt Sarah has been making it. I guess we'll get it finished to-day; and it's a beauty, too."

"Just as welcome as blossoms in May," said good Mrs. Ransom as she went in, and Miss Sarah looked up and nodded. She had her



mouth full of pins, and couldn't be expected to do more. "Bless the baby!" giving Brownie a hearty kiss, "his eyes get brighter and bluer every day. Bring Eddie's little rocker in, Lucy, and set it close to the fire. We had to let the parlor fire go out to-day, because Steve has just let us run out of coal. He's getting so he ain't no man at all. If you take my advice, Kate, you'll know when you're well off, and stay single. You are fixed so nice with no one to bother you. Somebody said your grandma was dead. I presume your papa will be coming home soon now?"

"We expect him this week," said Kate, with a little tremble in her voice.

"I know you'll be overjoyed to see him," said Mrs. Ransom, "he's been away so much, and stayed so long this last time. I will be right glad to see the Doctor in his accustomed place in the pulpit Sunday, myself. Mr. Percival is all very well, but we've got so used to your father, it doesn't seem right to see any one else standing in his place. Poor old Mrs. Belmont! Well, I'm glad there's one more tired traveller safe at home."

Miss Sarah had by this time filled the little pin-cushion with the contents of her mouth, and immediately found voice to ask: "What's the matter with you, Kate? You look as if you hadn't a friend in the world."

"I feel a good deal that way," said Kate, her eyes overflowing immediately.

"Why, what has happened?" they asked unitedly. "Your father is well, isn't he?"

"He's going to bring home a nice, new mam-



ma," spoke up Master Brownie, who had caught sundry fragments of conversation at home, and with Mamie as interpreter had managed to understand something to the effect that new mammas were extraordinarily nice to think about anyway. Harold had also encouraged the idea.

"Is it possible, Kate?" began Mrs. Ransom.

Kate nodded. "It is true," she said, "he is going to bring a wife home with him. I am so angry about it I don't know what to do."

"I don't blame you a bit," said Mrs. Ransom, emphatically. "I should think you would be. You poor child! Why, I wouldn't have believed it of the Doctor. There's no more need of his getting married than there is of my Eddie. But that is the way with the men; they are all alike. The idea! after all you have done to keep things together, too. It's an awful shame, and I don't blame you for feeling bad about it. If I was in your place, I believe I should do worse than just feel bad, though. I'd be apt to set my foot down that it shouldn't be, and if you did, I believe your father would give it up. He's under big obligations to you, and he knows it. You may take my word for it, Kate, if he had to choose between you, he'd never consent to give you up."

"Oh! I don't know, Mrs. Ransom," said Kate; "he don't seem to think anything about me. It's all his new wife and her two children. He has even asked me to give up my own pretty room that mamma had fixed up on purpose for me, to Elinor—that's her girl. Of course the children have occupied it with me;



that had to be; but it is all my own, and I can't bear to give it up."

"My days!" exclaimed Mrs. Ransom, "you don't mean to tell me, Kate Belmont, that the woman has a family?"

"Two children, a girl of fourteen years and a boy of ten. I know I shall hate them, Mrs. Ransom. And I am quite resolved upon one thing: Mamie and Brownie shall have as little to do with them as possible. I'm not going to have any mixing up. I'll take care of my own mother's children myself, and she shan't touch them if I can help it."

"I don't blame you," said Mrs. Ransom. "The idea of that blessed baby being knocked about by a strange woman! You don't want her to come and whip you and shut you up in a closet, do you, lovey?" to Brownie, who sat looking on with eager eyes and open ears.

The little fellow shook his curly head.

"Harry says she'll be a nice mamma," said he, stoutly, "and maybe she'll make dolls and f'annel horses for Mamie and me; and," a little excitedly, "there are not one closet to shut me up in—not one!"

"Is it possible that Harry is going to surrender without even a struggle?" asked Lucy, indignantly.

"He says that he shall not interfere," replied Kate. "He is one of your meek kind, and will make the best of it rather than have a fuss. Thank fortune, I am not like him."

"No, and I'm glad you're not," said Mrs. Ransom; "and if I were in your place, Kate, I'd just sit down and fold my hands, and let



that woman and her girl shoulder the work. I'd be the lady. I wouldn't do a solitary thing. My days! I do wonder what the church folks will say!"

"Say!" replied Miss Bush, sticking pins in the windowcurtain, "I'll tell you what they'll say. They'll say that its just like a man, that's what; and it is. 'Off with the old love, and on with the new.' I've seen the signs for a good while, but of course I knew enough to hold my tongue. I reckon you won't feel as if you had a home, now? I never knew two families to agree, yet."

"No, I don't suppose that I will," said Kate, hopelessly; "but really, Miss Sarah, I don't know what to do."

"I tell you what I'd do," said Miss Bush, resolutely; "I'd wash my hands of the whole set, swing loose and learn a trade, and be my own man. You can't tell me anything about it. I know what second wives are. I've seen whole families of 'em. She'll grudge you your victuals, to say nothing of your clothes, and she'll make your father see out of her eyes instead of his own. Just you mind, now, what I say."

"O Miss Sarah!" said Kate, in dismay, "if I were to do that, papa would never forgive me. He is so proud; you don't know. I believe his heart would break. I do wish I did know just what to do."

"If you're sharp you won't do anything," pursued Miss Bush; "I wouldn't. I'd undo instead. As to your father's heart, I'd let that break, and be glad to see it fly to pieces. Has he considered your's at all? One wife's enough



for any man, and all the Lord intended he should have, or he'd have made Adam two or three while he was about it. That's my opinion, if anybody wants it." Miss Bush here emphasized her remarks with snipping her scissors vindictively in the air.

"Well," said Mrs. Ransom, "I don't think I shall trouble myself to give the second Mrs. Belmont much of a welcome, and I don't imagine the church will; and, of course, Kate, you can't be expected to. If you treat them civilly, it is as much as any one could ask."

"Poor darling!" said Lucy, affectionately, following her to the door, as she hastily made ready to depart, for it was nearing four o'clock quite rapidly; "I am just as sorry for you as I can be, and if there is anything in the world that we can do to resent such ridiculous proceedings, you may be sure we'll do it. I shall let folks know just exactly what I think of it."

"I shouldn't be afraid to venture that the church will have an indignation meeting in regard to it," said Mrs. Ransom; and Miss Bush called after her to "keep a stiff upper lip. Stand up for your rights," said she, "and don't give an inch. Let 'em know what to depend on from the start, and it'll save oceans of trouble."

Wrapping her cloak closely about her, and clasping little Brownie's hand tightly in her own, Kate hurried toward home, feeling considerably fortified by the strong sympathy and advice of her three friends. She felt, more than ever, that it was necessary to be firm from the outset, and let the new-comers understand



that she was the protectress and defender of her dead mother's children, and that she did not mean that they should be imposed upon. "If only Harold would condescend to keep his tongue to himself," she said to herself; "but I shall see to it that Mamie has a lesson in regard to the affair. The idea that he should set the children to believing that she is going to be *nice!*" and in her energy she crushed the baby's hand so that he cried out: "Ouch! Katie, you are breaking ev'y one of my bones."



## CHAPTER VI.

### *MAMIE'S LESSON.*

**D**URING the busy days which followed Kate's heart lay heavy in her bosom. She did not feel more than half satisfied with herself after all, and though she went on and did exactly as she had intended to do, still the unacknowledged conviction that she was in the wrong forced itself upon her constantly and made her miserable. She gave up her room to Elinor, as she had been requested to do, but it was only the room she gave. She took good care to remove every article of furniture from it, together with all the pretty things that girls love, and with which it had always abounded, and searched the attic for old carpet with which to cover the floor, an infirm single bedstead, which had once belonged to Ward, a couple of half-worn cane-seated chairs, and an old chest of drawers, which she covered with a clean towel and made serve for a washstand also. Her own pretty bed-room set she then lugged up and stored away, and covered carefully from the dust with old sheets. She even took away the easy little rocker which had always been such a comfort to her, though she did not need it at all, and left nothing to adorn the perfect and almost severe cleanliness of the apartment and make the new sister feel that she was kindly thought of. Harold, looking in on his way to his own room, saw how it all was, and came



home at night accompanied by a boy bearing a lovely willow rocker and a pair of handsome vases. Of course, Kate was furious, but Harold could be determined once in a while himself, and she was obliged to see the dingy room brightened by these small additions to its comfort. She dared not trifle so much with the room intended for her father and his wife, and though she took care to remove everything that she and her mother had made, they were replaced in a measure, and the effect, though severe in its plainness, was handsome. When everything was ready, all was as neat and clean as a new pin, for Kate could not do less than this; she would have done violence to her nature otherwise; but it was all so bare, so unlike its natural self, that it was almost like going into another house.

It was the day the bridal party was expected. Kate had kept Mamie home all the week from school to help her with the extra work she had accomplished. Everything was done now, even to the supper being prepared almost entirely, (and we will mention that it was a very plain affair), and Kate was ready to dress the children.

"You may bring your plaid dress, Mamie, and Brownie will do well enough with a clean apron. Get one of his blue and white gingham ones out of the lower bureau drawer," said she, bringing a basin of water into the room and beginning to brush out the little boy's shining curls.

"I should think I ought to wear my best dress to-day, Kate," said the little girl, discon-



tentedly. "And Brownie ought to wear his new blue suit. Papa likes us to be dressed up."

"It is not at all necessary for you to think anything about it," replied Kate, coldly. "Anyway, it makes no difference. Bring the plaid, and hush."

"But, Kate," insisted the child, coming slowly with the dress and apron, "this plaid is just my school dress, and it has all faded so hateful, and those folks wont like me in it."

"It doesn't at all matter about the folks," returned Kate, snatching the dress out of her hand, and slipping it on without more ado. "I don't want them to like you."

"Why?" asked poor Mamie, with trembling lip. "Harold said they would, and he said I was to love them, and call the lady mamma. I think it will be real nice, Kate."

"You have no business to think anything about it," said Kate, red with anger; "and you must pay attention to what I say, and not Harold. You are expected to mind me, not him. Now you sit down there in Brownie's little chair while I finish his hair. I have something to say to you. Do you remember our mother, Mamie?"

"Of course I do," replied Mamie, much interested; "just as well as can be. She had such lovely blue eyes, and it seemed as if they were so full of the most beautiful something I ever saw; and she used to hold Brownie and me both at one time in her lap, and tell us stories and sing this song, Kate; do you remember?

'Shall we meet beyond the river,  
Where the surges cease to roll?'



Ward hums it to himself sometimes, yet. I don't believe I ever could forget her, Kate—ever in the world.”

“I should hope not,” said Kate, emphatically, “and I want you to recollect, Mamie, just what I told you the other day, that it is simply impossible for you, or any of us, to have another mother. There is only one real mother for any child; and when these folks come, you are to remember that they are nothing to you, no matter what they say or do. Just keep to yourself, and let them alone; that's what I want you to do.”

“But Harold says,” began the little girl, but Kate interrupted her at once.

“Never mind what Harold says; just pay attention to what I say. Father's new wife is not your mother, and nothing can ever make her so; and the girl and boy are not and never can be your brother and sister; and you are not to think of them as such or call them so. I hope you understand. It seems to me, Mamie, that you are terribly dull.”

“But, Kate,” said Mamie, “what if papa tells me and Brownie to call her mamma, you know? Maybe he will, and we will have to do what he says, won't we?”

“You needn't go to ‘what-iffing’ anything about it,” replied Kate, out of all patience. “All you have to do is to pay attention to me and behave yourself; that's all I ask of you. But you may as well know, first as last, that I don't intend to have any mixing up. Now, do you understand?”

“Yes'm.”



“When you want anything you are to come to me, and not to her. I shall take care of your clothes and everything just the same as ever, and you are never to ask any one of them to do the smallest thing for you. Now, do you understand?”

“Yes’m.”

“Brownie will do just as you do, of course,” cautioned Kate, buttoning up the little boy’s clean gingham apron. “You know he always has, so you must be careful to attend to what I say, and he’ll be sure to do all right. Now, to-night when they come, you just sit still over there in the corner until father speaks to you. Then if he tells you to shake hands with the folks, I suppose you will have to; but you needn’t say anything, and you needn’t hang round and try to act smart. Just keep still and they’ll let you alone. Now, do you understand?”

“Yes’m.”

“Go over there, then, and sit down, and whatever you do, don’t get up and go tramping about from room to room. Here’s a book with pictures in it; you may show them to Brownie, if you have a mind,” and, having finished her instructions, Kate betook herself to her room, and putting on one of her commonest dresses, returned to the sitting-room with a little skirt of Brownie’s which she was making beautiful with embroidery.



## CHAPTER VII.

### *THE HOME-COMING.*

**H**ALF-PAST five. The depot at Oakland was crowded with people awaiting the approach of No. 31. A long line of hacks were drawn up along the platform ready for the coming passengers; the baggage-men were running with their trucks, and the restless travellers lounged about in the waiting-rooms, impatiently awaiting the iron horse which was to carry them on their way. Just as the whistle sounded out upon the air loud and shrill, a carriage drove up hastily, and Harold Belmont sprang out upon the platform. "Drive up as near as you can," said he to the driver, "so the ladies will not be obliged to step in the wet;" for it had been raining dismally most of the afternoon and the streets were flooded. Having given this direction, the young man buttoned his overcoat more closely about his throat and walked rapidly forward to meet the incoming train.

It rolled leisurely into the depot and stopped, puffing and blowing as if out of breath with its hard run, and the crowd began pouring out of the cars, some running immediately for the dining-hall, others marshalling their company to the waiting hackmen whose deafening cries rent the air, while others marched off independently, loaded with boxes and bundles,



willing to walk a few blocks and save their hard-earned money.

In the very midst of this motley throng appeared a tall gentleman with fine dark eyes and pleasant countenance. He wore a heavy beard and moustache, and his bearing was courteous in the extreme as he gently piloted the lady on his arm safely through the crowd and landed her upon the platform, then turned to assist a delicate-looking girl who was slowly making her way across the intervening tracks with a crutch, supported by a bright little fellow of about ten years of age.

"There we are," said the gentleman, brightly, as they reached the lady's side in safety; "as snug as a package of dress-goods. Not a bone of us broken nor a hair out of place. The next thing is to look for ways and means to get home. I wish I had thought to telegraph for a private carriage to be in waiting; these hacks are mostly overloaded, and there is more crowd than usual at the depot to-night. I wonder what the attraction is."

Just at this moment Harold stepped forward. "Father, I have brought a carriage with me. I am so glad to see you home once more," holding out his hand, which his father took in a warm, loving clasp. Then raising his hat politely, he said: "This is not a very good place for introductions, but I presume this is Mrs. Belmont?"

"This is the new mother," replied his father proudly, "and this is a good little sister I have brought you, and a brother who will be able, I dare say, to help you cut up all sorts of pranks



during the long winter evenings. You have heard me speak of Harold, Lucia, my oldest son? It is good to see you again, my boy, and so good to get home. It was very thoughtful of you to bring a private carriage, son. Let us get to it immediately, please."

"It is at the east end," said Harold, offering his arm to the little lame lady; "this way, please," and as fast as circumstances would permit he guided them to the carriage.

Harold noticed with a twinge of pain as his father sank back among the cushions and gave vent to a little relieved sigh, that he was as happy as a child to get home again. "Poor father," he thought, "how his kind heart will sink, and how disappointed he will be, when he gets home and sees things as they are;" but he chatted away with him pleasantly, answering all his many questions in regard to the other children, as to how he was getting on at the store, about Mr. Percival's preaching, and how the church regarded his ministrations, as if his own heart was beating lightly and buoyantly in his bosom instead of lying there the dull, aching, spiritless thing it really was.

"By-the-way, Harold, what did the unusual crowd at the depot mean to-night?" asked his father, after they had ridden a block or two. "Is there anything going on of special moment in town?"

"Percival is to lecture before the Young Men's Christian Association," replied Harold. "He has awakened a great interest in the young men since he has been here, and in the surrounding towns also, and I suppose there was



a host of his admirers coming in to hear him. He is very popular."

"And deservedly so," said Mr. Belmont, heartily. "I am glad that he graduates next year. He will be ordained at once, then, and we shall have him in the lists. I predict for that young man a splendid future. But there, at last, are the lights twinkling like so many stars in our own comfortable little home. I suppose Kate has made a great spread for us; I meant to caution her about exerting herself unnecessarily. A quiet home-coming with a loving welcome is all we ask."

"I hope," said Mrs. Belmont, speaking for the first time since receiving the introduction, and her voice was peculiarly soft and gentle, "that you have thought of us as simply members of the home circle, coming to enjoy with you the home comforts and home blessings, and not as guests to be royally entertained. I should be very sorry if your sister should have felt it necessary to exert herself beyond her strength. The carriage is stopping. Is this home?"

"Yes, madam," said he, as the driver rolled off his seat and threw open the carriage-door, "this is home. Will you permit me?" and, jumping lightly out, he gave the lady his gloved hand.

As he opened the hall-door and conducted the new arrivals into the brilliantly-lighted hall, he felt a heavy sense of disappointment that Kate was not there on the threshold to receive them; but the parlor-door stood invitingly open, and there was a glorious fire in the



grate, and Ward was there—that almost compensated for Kate's absence—and the children were seated cozily in a corner of the sofa.

Mr. Belmont's voice rang out brightly and cheerily: "Ah! this looks good, doesn't it, Lucia? I'll throw off my overcoat right here in the hall, I guess, before I go in. Ha! here is Kate," as that young lady entered the hall from the sitting-room, where she had been on some trifling errand, her face as colorless as marble.

Mr. Belmont advanced quickly to the young girl's side, and with a much-concerned face. "Daughter, Katie," said he, "is there anything wrong? You look ill," and he drew her to him and kissed her tenderly.

"Kate hasn't been quite herself for several days," said Harold, in haste to say something that would account for her unnatural behavior.

"My dear," said her father, still holding her closely by the hand, "this is my wife. I trust that you will find in her a very dear mother; and, Lucia, you see in this dear girl of mine one of my greatest comforts and treasures. I am anxious that you should be much to each other."

Mrs. Belmont extended her hand with a few well-chosen words and a most sweet and winning smile; but Kate merely touched the hand, then dropped it, and, receiving the introduction to Elinor and little Clyde in the same cold, indifferent manner, led the way proudly into the parlor.

"Well, Ward, my boy, are you glad to see papa again?" asked Mr. Belmont of the lad



who sat in the chair, book in hand. "I am quite a stranger in my own house, am I not? Come, give us an old-time greeting. I declare, if I were to stay away much longer, I fear that I should be forgotten." With that he patted the boy merrily on the back, and, stooping over him, gave him a fatherly kiss. "So much for feeling too big to run and meet me as you used to do," said he; then to his wife: "You'll know this is Ward, at a glance. And now, where are the little ones? Over there in the corner? What's that for? Surely they are not afraid of papa. Come here, my darlings, and kiss me. Papa is hungry for a good look at his two little midgets; and this new mamma and sister and brother I have brought to you, all want to get acquainted. My! oh, my!" as they shyly sidled up to him, hanging their heads guiltily and stealing anxious looks at Kate, who stood looking at them, "this will never do. Look at my pretty rosebuds, Lucia. Are they not rare blossoms?"

For answer, the new mother stooped and gathered both timid children into her arms, and kissed them with a sweetness that thrilled them to the very centre of their trembling little hearts. They were going to slip back into their corner again, but papa threw around them a detaining arm, saying, in his bright, animated way: "No, sir; no, sir; you are not going to cultivate bashfulness with papa; here are your places, my darlings—one on each knee;" and he drew them fondly upon his lap.

Harold had not been idle all this time. He had brought forward the easiest chairs, stirred



the fire, helped Master Clyde off with his overcoat, and Elinor with her cloak and furs; and now he stood quietly and politely by, while Kate escaped to the dining-room, trying to set them all at their ease, and keeping up a running conversation with one and all.

"Let's see—what's your name?" said he to the little boy. "Oh, yes, Clyde, to be sure. Suppose you sit on the other side of father, Clyde. That's a good, warm corner, and you can put in your time getting acquainted with Mamie and Brownie. Your sister can have this rocker, then, right in front of the grate. It is very frosty to-night, I think; such a biting atmosphere. Now, then, Nellie—is that what your mamma calls you? Nellie is a favorite name of mine. And, mother"—he said it bravely, though it almost choked him; but the grateful look his father gave him more than repaid him for the effort—"take this arm-chair; the one you have there is a very uncomfortable one. I can say for Kate that tea will soon be ready."

In fact, it was quite ready, and waiting; and as soon as the travellers were thoroughly warm, they passed into the dining-room, in response to the bell, and gathered about the table.

"Would you be so kind as to keep your old place at the table and serve the tea for me this evening, my dear?" said Mrs. Belmont to Kate, as she stood aside to give the new mistress the seat of honor.

Kate merely bowed, and sat down behind the teaboard without a word.

A look of surprise swept for a moment over



the face of Mr. Belmont, as his eyes fell upon the plainly-spread table, with its cold meat, bread, butter, apple-sauce, and cookies, and failed to find the many delicacies for which Kate was famous; but the next moment he had bowed his head and was pouring out as hearty and fervent a thanksgiving as his manly soul had ever offered to his Father in heaven.

The meal, in spite of Kate's and Ward's almost perfect silence, passed off nicely; for Harold and his father, determined not to be cast down, found plenty to talk about, Mrs. Belmont joining in with cheerful heartiness, while Mamie and Brownie, having grown very bold by sitting on papa's knee, had several remarks to make on certain subjects of special interest to themselves. Brownie even went so far as to smile slyly at the new mamma, behind his mug of milk. As for Ward, as soon as he had swallowed his supper, he slipped out of the house and took his way down street.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### *WHAT SHALL WE DO?*

AT last the evening was over, and Kate piloted the delicate Elinor to her sleeping-room. There was a painful quiver around the mouth of the young girl as she kissed her mother and stepfather good-night, which might have broken out into tears had not Harold insisted upon giving her his arm up the stairs, and in leaving her at her door bade her a pleasant and kindly good-night. This helped matters wonderfully, and when Kate set the lamp down on the table with a little thump, which was capable of meaning a great many things, she found it quite possible to turn to her new-found relative and say affectionately: "Thank you so much, sister Katie, for taking such pains to light me up. I am such a poor hand to get about by myself that it is a little difficult to carry a lamp. Clydie generally attends me to my room, but it is so nice to have a sister. I have always so longed for one!"

"Will you want any more coal?" asked Kate, in her usual business-like way, "because if you do, Harold can bring some up at once."

"Oh, no, thank you," replied Elinor, brightly. "It is very nice and warm here, and I shall not be long to-night; only long enough to read my chapter."

Her chapter! What could the girl mean? Was it possible that she made a point of read-



ing her Bible every night? In spite of herself, Kate's natural curiosity led her to remain in the room until the young girl had opened her little travelling bag and taken from it a copy of the precious book. Nellie, seeing her hesitate, smiled upon her with the words: "Would you like to read with me? I should enjoy it so much. This is the time I miss mamma more than any other, for she has always made one with me in my nightly readings of the word. Have you a favorite chapter?" offering her the book.

Kate flushed scarlet and turned abruptly away. "I do not care to read," said she, coldly. "I believe I have a Bible of my own somewhere about the house that I can use if so disposed," and she turned to leave the room.

"Then, will you—would you kiss me good-night?" asked the home-sick little girl, her sweet, spiritual face alight with good-will such as angels know.

"I don't kiss," said Kate, shortly; then, pausing with her hand on the door, she said, "If you should want more cover there is a heavy blanket on the lower shelf of your wardrobe," saying which she left the room.

"The idea!" she exclaimed, as she wended her way to her own room. "'Sister Katie,' indeed! I think she is pretty fast if I know anything about it. She'll soon be very apt to understand that I don't consider her a sister of mine. 'Kiss me!' Did you ever? When I kiss her I rather guess she'll know it. 'Read a chapter with her!' I wonder what next! It looks very much as if she had an idea that all



in the world she has to do is to tell me to do this or that, and I'll be perfectly delighted to do it. She will probably find she has something besides putty to handle."

In spite of all this, Kate had an unformed wish in her heart that she had left some of the pieces of furniture in poor Nellie's room, and was secretly glad that the wardrobe was built into the house and not movable, and that Harold had bought the willow rocker and the vases for the mantel.

Mamie was wide awake when she entered the room, though she was lying very still, so as not to disturb Brownie, who, nestled amid the cloud of golden curls, was lost in sweet slumber; but her wide-open eyes followed her sister about the room as she was preparing for the night, and a timid little sigh burst from her burdened little soul, immediately attracting Kate's attention. She came at once to the bedside and looked down on the little girl questioningly.

"What's the matter with you, Mamie?" she asked sharply. "Why are you not asleep? What have you been about all this time?"

"Nothing," responded the little girl.

"What do you mean by nothing?" persisted Kate. "Come, I know there is something back of all this. You always go to sleep as soon as your head touches the pillow."

"Nothing but thinking," said the child.

"People go to bed to sleep, not to think," said Kate severely. "What were you thinking about?"

"Nothing much."

"That's no way to answer me, Mamie. I



want you to tell me the truth about it. What were you thinking so busily about as to keep wide awake like this?"

"Why," began Mamie slowly and hesitatingly, "I was just thinking how pretty and nice they all are, you know, and I was wishing that you would let me like them a little bit. Seem's as if I can't hardly help liking them some. Why can't I, Kate?"

"Because it is not at all proper that you should," replied the elder sister, shortly. "I am really surprised at you, Mamie. After what I told you this very day, I don't think you need anything more."

"Doesn't God want me to love them, Kate?" asked the little girl, rising on her elbow and looking her sister earnestly in the face.

"It doesn't matter anything about that," said Kate, much irritated. "You are too young, Mamie, to understand about such things. Lie right down, now, and go to sleep at once. The idea of such foolishness!" with which remark Kate turned out the lamp, and with a much perturbed spirit sought her pillow.

A single bedstead had been put in the boys' room for Clyde, and the little fellow was fast asleep, and Harold himself was thinking seriously of retiring, when Ward came shuffling in. He glowered at the sleeping boy, and then at the knee-pants and jaunty blouse waist, with its trimming of gold braid, hanging on the bed-post.

"Wasn't there any other place for that kid than in here with us?" he asked sullenly. "How can you stand it, Hal?"



"One can learn to bear almost anything," said Harold, cheerfully "Isn't he a pretty fellow, Ward?"

"Pretty enough for those who profess to have a fondness for him," said Ward, pulling off his shoes with a grimace, "but as I don't profess anything of the sort, he appears to me to be possessed of an extraordinarily ugly phiz, which I should take unalloyed delight in disfiguring."

"You can find it in your kind boy's heart to be at least civil to the little fellow, can you not?" said Harold, entreatingly.

"I'll be so civil as to read him certain portions of the law if he trespasses on my territory. Young Taylor and I are not likely to be bosom friends, Hal."

"May I ask where you have been all the evening, Ward?" said Harold, changing the subject.

"You may, my respected brother and august friend," replied Ward. "It is a free country, and questions are in order any time. Go ahead."

"You have not answered question number one yet, Ward."

"Oh! answering is quite another thing," said Ward, wickedly. "It is optional with me whether I *answer* or no. My goings and comings might not affect you agreeably; in fact, they might rob you of your hard-earned rest, and that would be bad."

"Ward, you are young to be living on the street, it seems to me."

"Am I? Who cares where I live or how soon I get to the end of the line?" said the



boy, recklessly, tossing his necktie toward the dresser but not on it. "The best thing I can do is to ruin myself as fast as possible and get out of the way. It is altogether likely I will be unfortunate enough to remind the new lady of her predecessor and conduce to family jars. I'm ready to blow out the light, Hal, if you are. Oh! yes; I forget your devotions," as his brother took up his Bible. "Pray for me if you have time," and so saying he went to bed.

Harold sighed. "If only you were serious about that wish," he said, "I should feel far more peaceful about you than I do;" over which remark Ward groaned dismally but did not otherwise reply.

Meanwhile the newly-made husband and wife still sat before the parlor fire. They did not seem inclined to converse, but sat very quietly thinking. There was a sorry, even a troubled look upon the pleasant face of the minister, and he sighed uneasily several times as if his heart was burdened, and the head leaning upon the shapely hand seemed bowed with grief.

"Does God ever make mistakes, do you think, George?" asked his wife, laying a gentle hand on the bowed head.

"No, my love, never," said Mr. Belmont, looking up from his reverie with a flash of his usual sunny smile. "Why such a question?"

"Because there are tears at the very beginning, George; tears in your eyes and my own, though we neither of us intend to let them fall. Our home-coming isn't just exactly in all points what we desired it to be, and our hearts begin



to fear lest our marriage be a grand mistake; and yet God joined us together, George, so the marriage service said."

"My dear," said the minister, "I had not intended to mention it to you—I didn't know that you had seen—but our marriage was no mistake, my love; I have not managed as wisely as I might, that is all."

"I am not cast down," said Mrs. Belmont, cheerfully. "I am not to be destroyed, George. I am not even disappointed. I expected rather a frosty welcome. It is natural that your children should feel that their mother's place could never be filled. I have a generous sort of sympathy for that kind of feeling. I like them for it. I never expect to fill the vacancy to them; but I intend to be their friend, and I think after a while they will consent to that."

"O Lucia," and there was a world of tender pity in his voice, "how can you? You surely had not looked for this?"

"Not exactly this," replied his wife, softly; "and yet, as I said, I am not in reality disappointed. I did not marry you, knowing you to be the father of five children, without taking their likes and dislikes into consideration. Of course, I understood perfectly how stepmothers are generally regarded; how they are nearly always an object of aversion; and I made up my mind to endure a great deal. I confess the temptation has come to me more than once this evening that it was possible that we had been mistaken in uniting our families, but as they are now united it is better to believe that it is



all right and act accordingly. The harvest would be a poor one without some dark and rainy days, and even a cloud-burst once in a while. I do beg, George, that you won't vex your righteous soul about *me*."

"Darling, Kate has broken my heart," said Mr. Belmont, brokenly.

"Oh, no, not broken; wounded, terribly hurt, but never broken. A heart stayed on the Rock eternal cannot break. I admit that Kate seems to be quite a lion in my pathway, but I don't doubt we shall find her perfectly harmless. Oh! don't let us mind these things, George. The God of Israel is just the same to-day as he ever was, and the watchword he has given to his people is, 'Go forward!'"

"God bless you, my dear; your words are inspiring. I will try to cultivate your admirable faith and rest upon the promises. But I am at a loss to know how to proceed—what is best to do. I never dreamed that there would be the least objection among the children to any movement that I wished to make. I see now that I have quite forgotten how the years have slipped away, and my boys and girls are beginning to feel the breath of their coming manhood and womanhood. Lucia, what shall we do? What course is right to pursue? What is the wisest, most God-like and best?"

"'Cast thy burden upon the Lord and he shall sustain thee.' Perhaps as we are in doubt just what path to take, it would be just as well to take the whole matter to the Lord in prayer and ask him to guide us in the right way. Then mistakes will not be possible.



‘Lead, Kindly Light.’ Shall we not take our Father’s hand?’

“How could I forget the everlasting arms,” said Mr. Belmont, reaching for his Bible. Then, opening at the forty-sixth psalm, they read together: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble,” and as they reread the last verse: “The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge,” they looked at each other with a triumphant smile, and Mrs. Belmont said, with a clear ring to her voice: “‘They that sow in tears shall reap in joy; and he that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.’”

“Lucia,” said the minister, “let us pray”; and together they approached the throne of grace.



## CHAPTER IX.

### *BROWNIE'S PENNY.*

THE next morning, just as Kate was touching a match to the kitchen fire, for she always made a habit of laying it overnight, and was always, from choice, the first one up in the morning, the rustle of robes and a light step, which was not at all familiar to her, approached the door. Looking up, she saw the pleasant face of her stepmother smiling upon her kindly.

"Good morning, my dear," said she, brightly. "I have had a delightful night's rest, and couldn't find it possible to remain in bed another minute. Besides, I heard you stirring, and I thought it was too bad to allow you to be the only busy one in the family. What a nice, roomy kitchen you have."

"It answers well enough," said Kate, pouring the coffee into the mill, and grinding away for dear life. "At least, I have always been able to get along in it well enough alone; its pretty crowded for two or three to work in."

"It seems quite commodious to me," said Mrs. Belmont, nothing daunted by the cool reception given her, "for we have lived in rooms and got along with light housekeeping for a number of years, the children and I, and a whole room devoted to cooking seems quite a vast affair to me. I have a great opinion of your housekeeping, my dear, for your papa was



never tired of giving me the most complimentary descriptions of it; so don't be surprised if I take lessons of you. You have had a long siege of it, and now we expect you to be the young lady of the house, and have a good time with your music, and books, and companions. I never expect much of Nellie, but Clyde is a host; a perfect treasure for a boy. He never leaves the wood-box or coal scuttle empty, and carries all the water, and does the errands like a man of business. And the best of it is, he is very fond of it."

Kate mixed her coffee and set it on the stove without answering. If there was one thing above another that she hated, it was having strangers coming in the kitchen when she was at work. But there was no getting rid of this pleasant-faced woman; she would stay in spite of her, and, more than that, she found helpful things to do, and did them, all the time talking away as if they were the greatest friends possible. Kate wondered how she could find so much to talk about; She was positive that she could not, were she in her place. "I should be snubbed to death," she said to herself. "But some folks never know when they are not wanted. I wouldn't be so perfectly wrapped up in myself for anything." And she dropped the steak into the hissing skillet in a most emphatic manner. Just at this point Mamie appeared with a lowered countenance and a coat over her arm. "Brownie won't let me dress him, Kate, what shall I do? And Ward wants his coat sewed up right away; he can't come down till you do it, he says."



Kate looked up with an annoyed expression. It was impossible for her to leave her meat just then; it needed turning in a minute. And the idea of having the children coming lagging in to breakfast was not a pleasant one either. Before she could speak, however, to direct the child, Mrs. Belmont took hold of the yielding hand, saying brightly: "Now, this is just exactly what *I* am good for, mending jackets and dressing babies. Let us go upstairs and see how Master Brownie will receive his new attendant," and away they went. Mamie chatting like a magpie, and Mrs. Belmont filling the pauses with some blithe, happy little word, all of which made Kate feel as if she could pitch the breakfast out of the door, instead of placing it on the table. Still, what could she say? What could she do? Her father had given her a right in the house superior to her own, and if she, and Mamie, and all of them were going to act like that, she might just as well step out at once. How she wished she had some place to go where she could make a home for herself, where she need never see these troublesome people again, and where she would be appreciated according to what she was worth. She ran over the list of her relatives and friends in her mind as she hurried about the kitchen upon one errand and another. There were plenty of them, she was sure, who would welcome her for her mother's sake, and help her to some employment whereby she could make her living. Chief among these was a sister of her mother's, living about a hundred miles away, a Mrs. Mink. Kate had always been a favorite with



her, and she not only felt quite sure of her Aunt Martha's sympathy, but was confident that she would do for her all she asked.

"I shall write to her at any rate," said she, "and ask her if I may come for a good, long visit. There will be no harm in that, and then, if I can't stand it she will be prepared. Thank fortune, I am in my nineteenth year and can do exactly as I please."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Belmont had coaxed Brownie out of his naughty notions, and, beguiled by a pretty story, he had allowed the new mamma to superintend his dressing, even to the terrible feat of combing out his tangled curls, something which he submitted to from Kate with great reluctance, and only because he had to. Then the rent in the coat was carefully darned, and Mamie was sent with it to Ward's room. "*She* mended it for you, Ward," said the communicative little sister, "and it is done nicer, a good deal, than Kate would have done it. And Brownie let her dress him just as nice, and after breakfast we're going a little walk with her."

"Who do you mean by *her*?" demanded Ward, taking the coat and examining the mended rent with a critical eye. "There are so many females about this house now, that it is necessary to designate them. Was it the old one or the young one, and why couldn't Madam Kate do it?"

"Why, because she's so busy getting breakfast; there's the bell now this minute. Why, don't you know who I mean by her, Ward? Its—its our new mother," in a whisper. "Don't you think its done very nicely?"



"It is done well enough, but I would have worn the coat with a rent forever before I would have let her do it," with which ungracious words he rushed downstairs to breakfast.

After breakfast, prayers, and then came the unpacking of the trunks and the arranging of the different belongings into their respective places. "I hardly know where to put my piano when it comes," said Mrs. Belmont. "You have one already in the parlor, I see. Would it be in the way in the sitting-room do you think, Kate? It is a very fine one or I should have disposed of it."

"Why, that one in the parlor isn't any good at all hardly," said Mamie, before Kate could make up her mind to reply. "There are some of the keys that don't sound at all, and none of us know how to play. Why couldn't it be taken out, Kate, and the nice one put in there?"

"Don't meddle," said Kate, sharply. "You know very well, Mamie, that the piano was our own mother's; she used to play on it, and it shall never be moved from where she left it if I can help it."

"Mine will set very nicely on this side of the sitting-room," said Mrs. Belmont, "and I think it will serve our purposes much better after all; for if Mamie has as much music in her fingers as she has in her voice I shall want to show her how to get acquainted with the key-board of my piano. I think it is of great moment to have a musical instrument of some kind in the room one uses most commonly, anyway, for one loves to sing and play in the evenings just before separating for the night."



"Just as you please," said Kate, coldly.

Mr. Belmont came to the door looking puzzled. He had been hanging some additional pictures in the study, and had hammer and nails in his hand. "Katie," said he, "where are all the pretty things that used to be scattered about so profusely?"

It was an unfortunate question, and one he was sorry for asking the moment it had passed his lips. Kate's face flushed a dark red, and her lips pressed themselves tightly together as she replied: "I put them away."

"Did you?" said her father; "I am sorry for that. I think they gave the rooms a bright and tasty appearance, and I am fond of pretty things. Would it trouble you very much, daughter, to rearrange them?" Having begun the struggle, Mr. Belmont meant to go through with it.

The burning crimson flooded Kate's face, and her brow contracted in a heavy frown as she jerked her embroidery cotton until she knotted it in two or three places. It seemed for a little while as if she were not going to reply at all, but finally she said, without looking up: "They were things that mamma and I made with our own hands. I didn't suppose you would care for them now; and as I have an undying affection for everything that dear mamma made or had to do with, I simply put them away among my treasures. Besides, I could not bear to think of all sorts of people handling them. They are sacred to me, and always will be. There can never in the world be but one mother to me. I shall be true to



her memory, no matter who else is false," with which words Kate arose and hurriedly left the room.

Harold and Ward were absent, but with that exception the children had all been present, and silent witnesses of the scene. Little Brownie, of course, only half-understood, though he could see by his father's perturbed countenance, poor Nellie's grieved eyes, Clyde's indignant face and small clenched fist, and, most of all, by the tears rolling down Mrs. Belmont's cheeks (for she had endured much that first day), that something had been said by sister Kate to hurt his new mamma's feelings, of whom he had grown exceedingly fond in the short time she had been with them. Unnoticed by the rest, he slipped softly from the room.

There were not wanting words of comfort from both husband and children, but she put all away with a smile. "I am quite silly, I think," said she. "Let us not say another word about it. I have a multitude of pretty things in my trunks, more than I know what to do with, and we will gladly let poor Katie have those that her mother made. It is no wonder she feels about them as she does. What is it, darling?" for Brownie had come back, and was pressing up timidly to her side with something evidently extremely precious clasped in both dimpled fists.

"I—I is solly for you, and so is Mamie; ain't us, Mamie?" appealing, as usual, to his champion; "but Mr. Percival gived me a weal nice new penny to buy canny wiv, and there's bootiful striped canny down street. You may



have my penny, new mamma, and go get you some, and 'nen the hurt will all go away, ev'y single bit ; won't it, Mamie?"

It was a very, very little thing, but there was undoubted healing in it. Mrs. Belmont caught the child in her arms and covered his sweet face with kisses. The new penny she kissed also, and said she should lay it among her treasures. "He has given me a heart of grace," she said to her husband. "It is a bow of promise amid the general deluge. Brownie has come like the dove with the olive leaf in its mouth ; and we must remember that this sweet child has been Kate's from babyhood. She has a heart, George, though she is determined to keep it hidden just now. I am sure we shall get to it by-and-by."



## CHAPTER X.

### *THE PRAYER.*

FROM this time Kate lost her hold upon the two little children. Their sympathy had been with their new mother from the first, and aside from her being kind and winsome, she had something which attracts the heart of childhood always—pure, undying love for the little ones; and in her they found something more than the mere care which Kate had given them; they found the sunshine of sympathy, and their young hearts were warmed by it, and grew like rare plants, and blossomed out beautifully. Not that they forsook Kate at all. Mamie, perhaps, took even more pains to be helpful to her, and Brownie brought the brush and comb to her of his own accord to have his curls arranged, although it hurt a great deal worse than when mamma or Nellie did them, and there was never any enchanting story to make him forget how it pulled. “But,” as he confided to Mamie, “Katie *loves* to do my curls.” Sometimes they would please Kate by making grave promises, but five minutes in the new mamma’s society would break them like slender threads, and they came to grief continually. One day, after a long curtain lecture from the sister they feared much more than they loved, Mamie burst out with: “I don’t care, Kate; I shan’t make another promise. I can’t help liking them, and neither can Brownie.”



And papa wants us to love every one of them; he has said so more than once, and he has lots more right with us than you have; and we want to like them; they're good—*now!*"

And then Brownie piped up: "Yes, sir; and Nellie reads to us on Sundays, and makes us sugar canny, and Clydie holded me on his knee and rides me to Boston and sings the old black cat, and once he kissed me and Mamie, and it tasted weal well, didn't it, Mamie, and we is going to love 'em just as our papa say, ain't us, Mamie?"

"Very well," said Kate, pushing them away from her, "you needn't love me any more, then; I don't want a divided heart. To think, children, after all I have done for you, that you should give me up—actually throw me away for the first strangers that come along."

"We don't throw you away," cried both children, pitifully; but Kate would hear no more, and put them away, and from that day they were in a measure lost to her.

Not only in the home did Kate's influence lose ground, but, after a time, in the church also. She had been quite popular there, even before her mother's death, being one of those practical burden-bearers of which there are never too many in any society—ambitious to carry the largest load and tell everybody afterwards how very heavy it was. She was never very deeply engaged in the spiritual interests of the church; she never thought of leading the devotional exercises of the missionary society; in fact, she did not by any means always find it convenient to attend. But she taught a



class in Sunday-school, and it was supposed she did it well. The little girls seemed interested and attended regularly, so it stood to reason in the minds of many that she must be a good teacher. Whether she taught Christ and him crucified or not was a question neither she or anybody else ever thought to ask. But there was no one quite like her for getting up a live paying entertainment, or soliciting funds for the improvement of the church. She it was who headed the committee for raising money for the pipe organ, the new library and singing books; and they all felt very positive in asserting that they would never in the world have been able to pay off the mortgage on the church building if it had not been for Kate's push and indefatigable industry.

Their sympathies were with Kate, too, in regard to the Doctor's marriage, not wholly or entirely, but very greatly. Perhaps they allowed themselves to be somewhat prejudiced from the fact that the second wife, unlike the first, was not taken from their own midst, but was foreign to their knowledge and congregation. However, the feeling was not so strong but that the perfect loveliness of Mrs. Belmont's character and the power of her strong mental influence was sufficient to turn the tide in her favor, and the majority of the congregation voted her a welcome addition to their members. To be sure there were some who were perfectly capable of standing out against her influence, and there were some whispering tongues at work, chief among which were Kate's friends on Rose street. These whisperers took pains to circu-



late strange and absurd stories in regard to the domestic troubles, which they asserted were constantly arising from the administration of the minister's new wife, of certain cruelties daily practised upon the children of the first Mrs. Belmont, and how the pastor himself was transformed from a once loving parent to a severe judge.

It was within a fortnight of the holidays, and Kate had gone to the lecture-room of the church in order to meet the other members of the programme committee, for they were to have in addition to their Christmas tree some special literary exercises. The committee was composed of two gentlemen and two ladies beside Kate, one of whom was Lucy Ransom. As they stood waiting for the delinquent members to assemble, Kate employed the time in rehearsing her woes in the sympathizing ears of her companion. "I am getting tired enough of it," she said, turning over the anthem book in the rapid search for a certain piece; "it is almost more than I can stand. Mr. Preston was at our house last night flattering Mrs. B. into taking charge of the infant-class in Sunday-school. And to hear him go on, one would think we had a perfect angel in our house. No one was so fitted for the position in his estimation. It needed the consecrated mind and heart he was sure she possessed, and a perfect knowledge of little folks, and more than all it needed love, and he was positive she had a goodly portion for all children. O dear! I can't endure Mr. Preston any more. I hope somebody will suggest a new superintendent for the coming year."



"Did you know," said Lucy, "that Clyde is expected to have a prominent place on the programme? I've heard several speak of it. You know, of course, his mother has been giving him lessons in elocution, and our Tommy says he is one of the finest speakers in the school building.

"I have heard her drilling him by the hour," said Kate, "and it all looks unnatural and silly to me. Just because she has been educated in these things, she thinks she can put everybody else through the same process. She has begun on poor little Brownie already, and she keeps Mamie at the piano two whole hours every day. But there is just one thing about it: If they are going to make idols of Mrs. B. and her children, they may say good-bye to Kate."

Just here the members they were waiting for came in, and soon they were all busy discussing the various abilities of this one and that one who was suggested as the best-fitted for this and that place on the programme.

"By the way, Miss Katie," said the chairman of the committee, Mr. Wayland, "why couldn't your sister take this solo in the opening anthem? I have understood from different quarters that she has an especially fine voice, and it will relieve some of the rest of us."

"My sister!" repeated Kate, puzzled for the moment; "my sister is hardly old enough to—"

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said young Wayland, hastily; "I meant Miss Taylor, not the little girl. Don't you think she could take this part? I have had so much trouble about that anthem; our sopranos are all too low to reach



the high notes in that solo clearly. I have never heard Miss Taylor sing, but Mr. Preston assures me that she sings like a bird."

Mr. Preston again! Kate turned coldly away. "I was not aware that Elinor could sing at all," said she; "I am sure that her voice is all of a tremble in singing some simple melody at home. I don't see why Mr. Preston should want to give you the impression that she can manage anything like this anthem; and, besides, she is, as you all are aware, a cripple, and ought not to appear in so public a position."

"Do you think she would mind it?" asked Miss Ashmore. "I think her countenance is such a sweet one that it alone would cover all defects. I have heard Miss Nellie sing in church, and it seemed to me that she had a wonderful voice for such a young girl. But perhaps the anthem would be a little too much of an effort for her, Mr. Wayland. Something simpler might be preferable; but I should say, have her on the programme by all means. You see, Katie, we have quite fallen in love with your new relatives."

"I see," said Kate, somewhat bitterly. "I hope you will not be disappointed in the object of your affections. No, thank you, Mr. Wayland; I couldn't possibly allow my name to appear for that duet. Our family is becoming altogether too famous."

"Then we must have another chorus instead," said Mr. Wayland, a trifle irritated. "Miss Lucy, can you attend to seeing the parties and getting them together to practice; and Miss



Katie, I shall depend upon you and Miss Ashmore to drill the children in their parts. Wilkins and Miss Russell and I will attend to all the minor matters; and do let us all try this once to make a perfect success of it. I do dislike a failure above all things. Let us employ the best talent at our command without regard to personal feeling. I don't think we ought to bring personalities of any kind into the house of the Lord. Christ looked beyond himself, and I think his followers should."

With the rebuke which these words implied ringing in her ears and creating in her heart a tempest of angry emotions, Kate walked rapidly towards home. It was already drawing near night, for the committee had met quite late, and the gas was being lighted in the principal streets. As she entered her own door and was passing her stepmother's room on her way upstairs, she noticed that the door was not quite shut, and heard a low voice within, softly and with much feeling, pronouncing her name. Jealous and distrustful, she stayed her foot and bent her head and listened. The next moment she became aware that it was Mrs. Belmont talking to God about her; praying that the love of the gentle Jesus might prove too much for her; that it might break every barrier down between the wayward girl and herself; praying that she, the mother, might be given wisdom from above to walk circumspectly before this one of her household who would not love nor let herself be loved; praying that an open door might be set before her—some means presented whereby she might reach her; praying that the



thought of self might be swallowed up in the one great Christ-like thought of making peace; and praying that God would mercifully sweeten the bitter cup of affliction with a sense of his love, that she might be able to drink it all and wait his time for deliverance and reward.

Kate crept away to her room and locked and bolted herself in before the voice had ceased. She could endure no more. She felt paralyzed by what she had heard, confounded and overwhelmed by the knowledge that her step-mother could love her and could tell God so upon her knees, when she had done nothing but hate her and talk against her from the time she had come into their midst. She was white, and trembling and cold, but she went swiftly about the room putting her clothes together in little heaps, counting the money in her purse, and packing trunk and hand-bag. Then she wrote a bit of a note, replaced the wraps she had laid aside, put the note where it would be found easily, took her bag in her hand, went down the back stairs and out at the back door, and took her way to the depot just as the darkness settled down and became pronounced.



## CHAPTER XI.

### *ARE YOU RIGHT?*

KATE hurried along toward the depot in a tumult of conflicting feelings very difficult to describe. She was both angry and sorry. The prayer which she had overheard had aroused her conscience to an alarming extent, and had convinced her to some extent, also, that she was decidedly in the wrong. Still, she never once thought of acknowledging it; she set her will steadily and unflinchingly against everything of the kind. But she felt that she must put distance between herself and the inmates of her father's house. That must be done. She could no longer endure the rebuke of her stepmother's righteous life. She might as well go to Aunt Martha first as last. She had written her the letter she had proposed doing, and had received in reply a warm invitation to come and stay just as long as she liked; nothing would please them better.

She was not used to being out after dark unprotected by father or brother, and she felt some natural fear as she hurried along the street. It was going to be a stormy night. The clouds were gathering above her head in black, ominous-looking billows, and there was a dull roaring in the air that betokened violent wind. Choosing the most unfrequented streets, she hastened on, for she was fearful of meeting either with Harold or Ward; the former



would be coming from the store about this time, and as to the latter, he was always prowling about. She knew her father was at home, for she had heard some one with him in the study as she went in.

At last she reached the depot. There were three or four trains making-up ready to start out, and she had some little difficulty finding the one she wanted. She went to the telegraph office and sent a telegram to Aunt Martha that she was coming, that she would be there probably somewhere about eleven o'clock, and to meet her with the carriage. Then she went directly to the ticket-office to purchase her ticket. She was asking some questions of the ticket-agent, and was trying to appear self-possessed while she counted her small stock of money, and handed out her one five-dollar bill in pay for her ticket to McKinleysville, and was waiting for the change, when a pleasant voice at her right accosted her.

"Miss Katie, good evening. Just come from somewhere? Can I help you with your baggage? Will you have a hack, or is Harold here to meet you?"

Kate turned abruptly at the sound of the manly, pleasant tones, and there beside her, wrapped in his long ulster, and with his satchel-strap slung over his shoulder, was the young minister, Mr. Percival.

She didn't exactly know whether she was glad or sorry to see him. Perhaps she was both. Glad to see a friendly face in the lonely depot; glad to feel a sort of relief and protection in his presence; glad to see him because she liked



him very much—more than any gentleman she knew—but sorry that he should see her there; sorry lest he should get an inkling of her movements, and perhaps feel that it was his religious duty to interfere; sorry and ashamed, too, to have him know that she was leaving home because she must, and going where she had no legal right to stay. But she managed, though in a constrained way, to return his salutation, and even took the proffered hand he held out.

“Excuse me,” said he, as his keen eye caught sight of the ticket that was passed to her through the little window of the ticket-office, together with her change. “But, Miss Kate, will you forgive my impertinence if I ask what that means? You are going instead of coming, and—to McKinleysville? I sincerely beg pardon, but I saw it on the ticket.”

Kate blushed crimson as she stowed away the bit of pasteboard in her purse. Then she walked toward the waiting-room, saying: “Yes, I am going to Aunt Martha Mink’s on a good, long visit.” But she could not help adding, “I don’t see why you had to look at that ticket.”

“I don’t either,” said Mr. Percival meekly, keeping close to her side. “But my eyes will wonder from their duty sometimes. I wish you could be prevailed upon to tell me just how you are going, Miss Katie; whether alone or with acceptable company. I feel a friendly interest in knowing that you are comfortably cared for.”

“I am going alone,” said Kate, curtly, “and I beg as a special favor, that if you are going down to our house—to father’s, I should say,



you will be so good as to say nothing of having met me here. I left word where I was going, but I would rather they didn't know it just yet, as they might object to my going alone, and I am not a particle afraid."

"I am not going down there," said Mr. Percival, following her into the waiting-room. "I am going to McKinleysville, too."

"I trust you are going to do no such thing," said Kate.

"I am," he replied, "and I hope you'll be good and let me occupy a seat with you. I have some business in that direction. There's a little church not far from there that I have been invited to preach to once in a while, and I want to run up and see about it."

Kate looked incredulous, but had no answer ready, so Mr. Percival seated himself beside her as if he had come to stay.

"Do you know what time our train starts out?" he asked, moving her hand-bag to his side of the seat and speaking in a comfortable tone. "I'll get my ticket after I see you safely aboard. There is always an abundance of time."

"I believe the ticket-agent told me the train would be called in ten or fifteen minutes," replied Kate, coldly. Then she added pleadingly: "Please, Mr. Percival, do leave me by myself. I don't want anybody with me. I so much prefer being alone."

"I know you do," returned the young gentleman coolly, "but I find it quite an impossibility to grant your request this time. Unfortunately I have no company, and I do so dislike travel-



ling alone. It makes me quite miserable. Do try to put up with me, Miss Kate, I'll promise to be very good."

Kate looked at his serio-comic face and laughed in spite of her low spirits. Just then the train was called, and Mr. Percival, taking her hand-bag in one hand, assisted her across the net-work of tracks to the cars in waiting. After he had seen her comfortably seated, he returned and bought his ticket, but was with her again in a few moments.

"Now, see here, Mr. Percival," said she, abruptly, "I am not to be deceived by your cunning strategy and fine arts. I feel confident that when I met you in the depot you had no more notion of going to McKinleysville than you had of going to the capital, and I don't like your doing so at all."

Mr. Percival did not reply immediately. He was very busy taking off his ulster, and stowing the umbrellas and hand-bag in the rack overhead. The window had been thrown up by the last occupant of the seat, too, and must be let down so the night air would not come in on his companion, and then there was a boy going through with papers and magazines, and he took some little time in selecting from them a late number of Harper's for her amusement. The train had been started some minutes by this time, and was speeding on through the now pouring rain and pitchy darkness. Then, in a very gentle, serious, truthful tone of voice he turned to her and spoke his answer: "My dear Miss Katie," said he, "I didn't mean to go to McKinleysville to-night, that is very true.



I had come down to consult your father in regard to the little church I spoke to you of visiting with an eye to supplying somewhere in the near future. But when I saw you alone, and I thought looking very unhappy, going out into the stormy night companionless, our Father in heaven gave me another commission. He said to me: "There's my little girl going off by herself unprotected. I want you to go with her and see her safely to her journey's end. I have always tried to yield to good promptings, and I am sure you will not chide me for doing so this time."

"I don't see how you can believe that the Lord takes care of us in every little thing," said Kate, struggling with her tears. "I always think that it sounds rather irreverent to talk of him in that way, just as if he was a personal friend—a father or a mother."

"And isn't he?" asked Mr. Percival. "Do not the Scriptures say, 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him'? And here is another: 'As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.' And does not the book say that 'he giveth his angels charge concerning us, to keep us in all our ways'; and that 'he is round about his people, as the walls are round about Jerusalem'; and that 'he marks the sparrow's fall, and even numbers the hairs of our heads'? Are you not of more value in his eyes than many sparrows, my dear sister? Be not faithless, but believing. Will you further forgive me if I ask you just why you undertake this journey without the knowledge of the folks at home, and



why on the evening instead of the morning train?"

Kate tried to laugh lightly. "I thought that I would give them a little surprise," said she. "They are so used to my doing everything in the ordinary way, they don't look for anything else where I am concerned. It isn't likely that they will miss me, however, until they have some special need for my services. Then, there is the note that I left to enlighten them."

"But they will worry about you, even then, will they not?" asked Mr. Percival, anxiously.

"I don't see why they should," said Kate. "Ladies travel by themselves every day now, and make long distances alone. Besides——" Kate hesitated here, but in a moment went on desperately: "I might as well tell you about it, I suppose; I see you are determined to know. The truth is, Mr. Percival, I felt that I could not stay there any longer. It was an impossibility for me to like my father's wife and her children, and I am sure that they will be much happier with me out of the way. I feel that I have no interest in the home any more. Even the children have turned against me, and think everything that Mrs. Belmont says is law and gospel. Some people might not have minded it, but my disposition is peculiar. When I get to Aunt Martha's, I shall write to father, and have him send me my trunk, and then they can have the house to themselves. I am satisfied that my room will be far more acceptable than my company."

"Have you any well-balanced plans for the future?" asked Mr. Percival, kindly.



"I have a plan," returned Kate; "I can't say whether it is a well-balanced one or not. I have an idea that I can teach school. I got a certificate for a year, once, and I fancy that I could do so again. I would have to study up some, of course. I believe that I should like it very much—more than anything else."

Her companion was silent for some time. When he spoke, his voice was quite solemn: "Are you sure that you are right in taking this step, Miss Katie? Are there not some mental misgivings about it? Have you calmly counted the cost of such a movement? Of course public opinion is something which we are all more or less anxious to appease——"

"Public opinion may keep to itself, so far as I am concerned," said Kate, hotly.

"I wish it would," said the young minister, meekly, "but how are you going to make it do so? That's the question. People will talk just as they please, and we have to let them. The only way that I can think of to get along with them is, not to give them anything to talk about."

"Oh! well," said Kate, irritably, "if they are talking about me, they are not talking about anybody else; that is one comfort."

"That is something, to be sure; but, Miss Kate, you have not answered my question yet. Are you sure that you are right? Have you settled it with Jesus Christ? Is he leading you in this?"

"I don't know whether he is or not," replied Kate, uneasily. "I don't suppose that he is. But, Mr. Percival, there really seemed nothing



else to do. Yes, I am sure that I am right; I *know* that I am."

"All right, then; that settles it. Now, is there anything that I can do to make you any more comfortable? Will you try to sleep a little, lunch on bananas and oranges, or try to look over this magazine? The light is not excessively brilliant—hardly bright enough to read intelligently—but I think you can see the illustrations."

"Please excuse me," she said. "You are very kind, but I would much rather be quiet."

"I will consent to that with the proviso that you will consider me your brother and friend, and call upon me if you should want anything. I am willing and anxious to do anything in the world for you, Miss Katie, that lies in my power."

However, Kate shook her head and turned her eyes to the window upon which the cold rain was beating, and the journey proceeded in silence. They had to change cars and lay over for a long weary hour at Kimball's junction, so that it was something after eleven o'clock when they arrived at McKinleysville. It was a town of possibly two thousand inhabitants, very prettily laid out, and the waiting-room was exceedingly pleasant and attractive. But Kate cared for nothing but a sight of her uncle's face. He was there in a moment or two after she entered it, and greeted her cordially.

"I don't know what to do, though, Kate," said he, "we are in a mighty tough fix at our house. Both of the children are down with malignant diphtheria, and my wife's just about worn out. We knew you would have started, or we would



have telegraphed for you not to come just now. Not but what you are just as welcome as welcome can be, but I wouldn't have you take the disease for anything in the world. It goes mighty hard with grown folks, I've heard said. However, if you want to risk it, all right; Martha will be very glad to see you. But if you're a mite afraid, I reckon you'd better let me take you over to the hotel and stay till morning, and then go back home on the first train, and try it over some other time."

Now, if there was one thing in the world of diseases that Kate was more afraid of than another, it was diphtheria. She had seen a little cousin die once of that dread disorder, and her face whitened at the very thought of being exposed. Still, she could not return home; that was not to be thought of for one moment. This she explained to her uncle as well as she could, and together they stood making one fruitless plan after another. Suddenly a thought struck Kate, and she brightened immediately. "O Uncle Allen, you know mamma's friend, Mrs. Knox, in Clinton? She has invited me to visit her so often. I will go there until you get better at your house. It will be just the thing."

"Why didn't you tell me that you were acquainted with that little lady?" asked Mr. Percival; "she is my friend, too, and the little church at Clinton is the very one I am talking of serving for a while. I will go right along up with you in the morning. It is only twenty-five miles further on."

And so it was arranged, and Kate was made



comfortable at the nearest hotel. But it was a restless night she passed. In vain she beat up the pillows, opened the window to let in the air, and turned wearily from side to side. The prayer which she had overheard seemed to be written in letters of living fire upon her heart and brain, and even in her uneasy dreams she still heard the soft, sweet, earnest voice pleading at the mercy-seat for her. She sat up in the bed and fanned her feverish face. What if God should think best to answer that prayer? Could he make her so sorry for what she had done that she would be willing to say, "Forgive me?" Could he make her love that woman? Her heart raged with the thought. And so the night passed away, and the day dawned.



## CHAPTER XII.

*MRS. KNOX.*

THE next morning as Kate and Mr. Percival were waiting in the little depot for the train, Mr. Mink came in accompanied by a little lady in grey, who was exceedingly good to look at, she was so full of sunshine. There was "sunshine in her soul."

"This lady is going on up to Clinton with you," said he. "She's the primary school-teacher up there; have taught there as much as four years, haven't you? She is a second cousin of mine, and has been down helping Martha a few days. Miss Richie, Miss Belmont. She's heard us talk about you, Kate; she knows *you* all right."

"I do feel that I hardly need an introduction," said the little lady, in her quiet, sunshiny way. "Thank you, I have met Mr. Percival. I am so glad that you know Mrs. Knox and are going to spend some time with her. I shall hope to see more of you, as she is a special friend of mine. Mrs. Mink is so disappointed that you cannot come to see her now as proposed. She sent a multitude of kind messages to you by me."

"And how are the little ones this morning?" asked Mr. Percival.

"I regret to say, no better. I should have stayed, but my school needs me."

Kate was very glad to see Miss Richie, and



said so with her characteristic earnestness. It was comforting to have the society of a lady just now, and the two were soon engaged in a pleasant conversation, from which they were aroused by Uncle Allen announcing that their train was in sight.

"Well, take good care of yourselves," said he, shaking hands all round. "We'll be sure to let you know how we get along, and just as soon as the little fellows get so they can have company, we shall expect to see you down our way, Kate. Good-bye. Be good to yourselves."

"I think almost half the neighborhood knew that you were expected," said Miss Richie to Kate, as they settled themselves in the train. "It does seem so funny how fast a bit of news spreads. Ever so many interested parties stopped us on our way to the depot this morning with inquiries about you."

"There are no secrets in small places like McKinleysville and Clinton," observed Mr. Percival. "A person's ideas are hardly safe. They are in danger of being picked out of his head and circulated before he himself is scarcely aware of them. I like the warm, social feeling of these little towns, though; and I enjoy preaching in them. Of course, my experience has not been immense, but I often feel as though I should like to settle down in some serene sequestered village and end my days."

"They are very anxious to obtain your services at Clinton," said Miss Richie; "the only objection seems to be the distance."

"I shall not mind that if I can be convinced that the hand of the Lord is in it," said Mr.



Percival. "I can easily arrange my recitations so that I can make up for the Monday forenoons. And it would only be once in two weeks. I suppose you and Mrs. Knox are as busy as ever in the Sunday-school and Young People's Society?"

"We are doing the best we can to keep them alive; at least, Mrs. Knox is; she never gives any good thing up, you know. It is sure to prosper in her hands. She is just as busy as she can be taking care of people. I do think that if the Lord ever did have a faithful laborer in his vineyard, it is Mrs. Knox."

"I am with you there, said Mr. Percival. "She is certainly the breeziest little woman I know of, and does more to take the kinks out of folks than anybody I ever saw. Oh! you won't trouble her a particle," replying to an anxious look which he observed on Kate's face. "You can dismiss every fear on that score. She loves to be taken by surprise; she is equal to any emergency, and is never quite so happy as when she has a lot of company to entertain; she is a woman of such unbounded faith, too. I never go there without receiving a decided uplift."

"I don't think," said Miss Richie, "that I ever saw any one who reflected Christ more than she. She is what I like to call a shining Christian. No one can look at her without seeing the Light of the world within."

And so they talked, and Kate sat and listened and wondered. Could they really believe all they said? Was Jesus so much nearer and dearer to them than to her? Why was this?



She was still puzzling over this question when the train stopped at Clinton. This was a much smaller town than McKinleysville. There were no carriages to take her to her destination, and she was obliged to pick her way along the sloppy, broken, wooden sidewalks as best she could. The beautiful house into which she was ushered, however, and the beautiful little woman that greeted her so royally, more than compensated for the inconvenience which she had suffered.

Little Mrs. Knox (for she was literally a little woman, not much above Kate's shoulder) bustled about, throwing open the parlor shades, punching the fire in the grate, bringing in some hot lemonade, to keep them from taking cold, and talking the sincerest and brightest of welcomes to them all the time.

"You'll just stay with us now, we've got you, over Sabbath and preach for us," she said to the young minister, smiling radiantly in the intensity of her enjoyment. "We have the most forlorn little congregation you ever saw," to Kate. "Dear old Mr. Wright said yesterday he almost believed the Lord had forgotten us, but I said, 'No!' I told the old gentleman that I thought the good Shepherd was going to a great deal of pains to get us the man we want, and now here comes Arthur. As if the Lord could forget his own!"

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Percival. "I like that. That's the voice of faith. Let's see: this is Friday, isn't it? I do not know but I might manage to stay."

"If you don't manage it I shall undertake to



do it for you," said the little lady right merrily. "Catch me letting go of you until Monday morning."

Mr. Percival laughed. "Well," said he, "I don't know but I may as well submit gracefully. By-the-way, isn't this your prayer-meeting evening? I suppose you still keep them up?"

"Why, to be sure we do," responded Mrs. Knox, bringing a hassock from somewhere and tucking it under Kate's feet with a nice, loving little pat or two. "I'll tell you what I'll do, Arthur. You see we haven't any regular sexton; we take turns around taking care of the church, and prayer-meeting evenings I generally run around and light the fire myself, for John's at the store, you know, and I like to have it good and warm; and if there isn't a soul there but Mr. Wright and John and I, we have a prayer-meeting, and we have a good one, too."

"I believe it," said the minister, gravely, "and I know that Jesus makes one of you. I shall be very glad to begin my advent among you with a prayer-meeting. It seems to me like a promise of good things to come; and Miss Katie will enjoy making one of us, too, I hope."

Kate murmured an affirmative answer, and Mrs. Knox, well pleased, bustled about to see about dinner. After that meal Mr. Percival went out to make some calls on some of the leading members of the church, and Mrs. Knox drew her chair up close to Kate's and began a sweet, confidential chat.

"I am so glad you came," she said. "It is exactly what I have been wishing for so long,



for I not only love you for your precious mother's sake, but for your own. I've no girls of my own, you know, and I do love to mother other people's girls; and Arthur tells me that you are going to be good enough to stay a few days with me. That is right, the longer the better. I call Mr. Percival Arthur, my dear, for I have known him ever since he came into the world; used to cuddle him when he was a baby, and took him to Boston on my knee time and again when he was a wee laughing boy, and I do love him so. He is so good, just number one, a thoroughly tip-top young man. I am hoping that God intends to let us have him preach for us a while. We do so need a consecrated young man, one who isn't afraid to work, and who is in the habit of standing by the Bible.'

"I think, in all probability, you will be able to obtain his services," said Kate. "He said—that is, I thought he spoke as if he was very much inclined to come here for a time."

"That is charming intelligence. Of course, we know he cannot settle here; he is not through with his studies yet, and his abilities will open to him a wider door of usefulness; but we all feel that he can give us some of the many good things that daily come to his lot; and I tell you, we are so starved for the gospel up here, that I am positive we shall be glad of the crumbs which fall from the Master's table. How nice it was that you happened to be travelling in the same direction. You are old acquaintances, are you not? I have frequently heard him speak of your father."



"I think father met him some two or three years ago at Presbytery," replied Kate. "The rest of us never saw him until he came to Oakland to supply the pulpit in my father's absence. He stopped at our house and we obtained a pretty good knowledge of each other."

"Yes," said Mrs. Knox, looking at the young girl thoughtfully. "Oakland is a beautiful place, my dear. I have not been there for many years, not since your second brother—what is his name? Ward, yes—was a babe. Your mother was the very dearest girl friend I ever had in my life, my dear. And now she is at rest among the blessed in heaven. You are expecting to go home to her by-and-by when life's duties are accomplished, are you not?"

Kate bowed; she could not trust herself to speak.

"I thought so," said the little woman, patting Kate's trembling hand lovingly. "And you have been mother to the rest of the little flock all this time. How many are there of you, my dear?"

"There are five children of us: three boys and two girls."

"And I hear the Dr. has married a second time. Well, my dear, such changes are not always pleasant; but how comforting to know that our Father understands just how to make all the unhappy things of life turn into blessings, and that he will do so if we will only commit all to him. Now, I am going to ask you to excuse me. I know that you will want to write a line to your father and let him know that you have made a safe journey, and that



you are at my house instead of at Mrs. Mink's, as you intended. You will find my writing-desk on the table in the corner, and do you just take it and sit down and chat as long as you like with the home folks. We will drop it in the office as we go to prayer-meeting this evening. Write just as much and as long as you like, and I'll go out to the kitchen and see how Hetty's baby is getting on. It had a bad attack of croup last night. Hetty is a poor widow woman whom I engaged to help me do the work. She is just as good as gold, but she has two babies: one three years old and the other only eight months—the sweetest little thing. We think everything of them—John and I. Having no children of our own, we are almost silly over a baby, and we could keep these two so much better than most other people, and the poor woman was obliged to work for her living, and we thought it would be a sin to part them. You must see them by-and-by."

"I shouldn't think she would be much help to you," said Kate.

"Oh! she is a great help, and so honest and careful; and the babies are very little trouble. They play with their rag dolls and rattles almost all the day, and when they tumble over in a sleep, we just tuck a pillow under their heads and throw a shawl over them; and we don't hear a whisper of them any more for two or three hours. You see, poor Hetty is a drunkard's widow, and, oh, dear, she was in such a terrible plight when he died. It was necessary to do all we could for her. It was



just an absolute Christian duty. But here I am running on again. John says my tongue is the largest member of my body, and I guess he's about right. Now, I really *will* go," and she did, leaving Kate wondering over the disclosures she had made. How could she endure this woman and her babies in her beautiful home, when she might have her choice among the working-girls, many of whom were so pretty and pleasant. Kate did not understand this kind of Christianity; and she hardly knew why a favorite verse of her mother's floated softly through her mind as she still sat thinking of the little lady. It was this:

“With weary human feet he, day by day,  
Once trod this earth to work his acts of love;  
And every step is chronicled above  
His servants take to follow in his way.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### *KATE'S LETTER.*

KATE arose listlessly from her comfortable seat by the fire, and going over to the corner table, wheeled it up close to the glowing grate, and carefully lifted the lid of the little rosewood writing-desk. It was a dainty thing, with the top inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and a silver plate on which was engraved the initials E. S. K., and it was filled with the daintiest of paper and envelopes. A gold pen with a silver holder lay in its own little nook, and postage stamps and postal cards were plentiful. Kate had an eye for pretty things, and stood for some time looking over the very admirable box; then, with a weary sigh, she lifted a postal card, and drew her chair up to the table. After she had arranged everything, however, she was still uncertain just how to act. She had not intended to write home quite so soon. She saw no special need of it, herself. But it seemed that Mrs. Knox did, and it might be she would ask her some troublesome questions should she neglect to do it. However, if she must write, she did not see why a postal card would not do about as well as a letter. All that she should feel like saying would most assuredly go on that, and what was the use of trying to do anything further. She hesitated for some time, now laying down the postal card and taking up the dainty sheet



of linen paper, and even selecting an envelope from the snowy heap, and hovering over it with her pen; then picking up the card, then the paper, then the card, until at last she decided on the paper, and drawing it toward her, wrote with singular swiftness the following:

“CLINTON, *December 8, 18—.*

“DEAR FATHER: Mrs. Knox, the lady who is, at present, entertaining me, thinks it is my duty to write you concerning my whereabouts, lest you be unduly anxious about me, and although I am quite sure that I am not of such consequence as to cause you a very great degree of unrest, I feel it to be quite impossible to assign a reason for not doing as she thinks proper, so I send you this letter.

“I fully intended going to Aunt Martha’s, as I said in the note I left, but I found upon arriving at McKinleysville that they had very serious contagious illness at their house, and so I came on to Clinton, to make my long-promised visit to Mrs. Emily Stanhope Knox, my mother’s dearest friend. I knew I should be welcome here, and so I am. I shall stay until I find that Uncle Allen’s folks are out of danger, and then I shall go there, and go to stay, at least until I can provide for myself.

“Of course, you expect me to do this. Of course, you must have known when you found that I had gone away, that I had no intention of ever returning. Why should I? I ought to have left weeks ago. Home is no longer to me what it used to be, and it never can be again.

“There is no need of multiplying words. I



have told you where I am, and that my intentions are to obtain suitable employment as soon as I can. I think I shall try to teach; and, now, I have discharged my duty, if duty it was, and nothing remains to be done.

"I will only trouble you to send me my trunk at your earliest convenience. I packed it and brought the key with me.

"Your daughter,

"KATE BELMONT."

She had just folded her missive and sealed it up in its envelope, when the door opened and her hostess came in, her cheeks rosy-red with being kissed by the north wind. "I have a noble fire going in the old church," said she, gaily, "and every corner will be as warm as toast in an hour. I ran across Edna Richie, too. You never told me, and neither did Arthur, that she came up with you on the train this morning. She is the dearest girl in the world—don't you think so? I must tell you a little bit about her while I am warming my feet. You must know that she just struggled with everything from childhood up: drunkenness, disease, and dear knows what. Her father died of delirium tremens when she was only twelve years old, and her mother had lain in bed for three years with hip disease at the time, and for two long years after, and besides that, she had a brother that had these epileptic fits, and this child had no one to help her but an old grandmother. How the two got along no one ever could rightly tell, but they managed somehow to keep from starving. I know Edna



worked in a woollen mill. Well, you see, she was the greatest hand to read and study that you ever saw, and she was all the time borrowing books and reading every spare minute. Among other things she read the lives of several missionaries, and deep down in the child's heart she wanted to go and tell about Jesus to the heathen. Her mother died when she was fourteen; her brother almost immediately after, but her grandma lived on until she was sixteen, and that girl was perfectly devoted to her. She is twenty now, and is one of the best educated girls in the radius of two hundred miles. She has worked her own way up, and is deserving of all the praise that my poor tongue can give her, at any rate. I want you to know her better. She is coming to the meeting to-night, and—you should see poor old Mr. Wright; he is overjoyed at the prospect of having a prayer-meeting with a minister in it, as he says. The only trouble is the singing; we none of us know how very well. Now, *you* do. I *know* you do. You could hardly be your mother's daughter without having something akin to that splendid voice of hers. And you will sing for us, you and Arthur. I see you have been dutiful and have written your letter to papa. That is right. And now, can you amuse yourself with books and pictures while I run out in the kitchen and help Hetty just a wee bit about the supper? There is a hymn-book on the organ. Just pick out a lot of nice pieces to sing while I'm gone, will you not?" and before Kate could open her mouth to reply, the little lady was gone.

Kate picked up the copy of Gospel Hymns,



and turned the leaves aimlessly. She was fond of singing, but she did not enjoy the prospect of going through the half-frozen mud to a prosy little country prayer-meeting and amusing a half-dozen people with her rare voice; but of course it would seem ungracious in the extreme to refuse her hostess such a request; and so she sat herself down to her unwilling task. Soon she became interested, and made her selections carefully; for it was Kate's way to do with care and painstaking anything which she had to do. The rain had passed away, and the evening was clear and cold. There was quite a handsome congregation in the little Clinton meeting-house that evening, and Kate sat and listened curiously to the quaint remarks of old Mr. Wright, and felt more than usually interested in the prayers which were uttered by the simple people, and was glad and soothed in heart that they seemed to enjoy her singing. It was something to have one and another, at the close, grasp her hand with a warm pressure, with words like these: "Your singing did me so much good"; and "I just wish you could always be here to meet with us."

When Mr. Percival gave an opportunity to those who desired to be Christians to make it known, and a great, awkward, plain-looking girl on the back seat rose and said, "Pray for me," in common with the others, Kate bowed her head, and felt her eyes growing misty.

On the way home, she asked Mrs. Knox two questions. One was, if Miss Richie still cherished the desire to be a missionary.

"She will never give it up, I think, my dear,"



replied the good woman; "but, in my opinion, Edna is enough of a missionary right here in Clinton. There's lots of ignorance about Christ right here, Katie. That poor girl who said, 'Pray for me'—oh, dear! she is so ignorant, poor child!"

Then this was Kate's other question: "Do you think, Mrs. Knox, that such people are of any advantage to a church?"

"My dear," said Mrs. Knox, "I will let Arthur answer that question."

Kate's letter arrived at Mr. Belmont's while the family were engaged in eating supper the next evening. The carrier rang the bell, and Mamie and Brownie ran a race to the door to get the letter.

"It looks just exactly like Kate's writing," said Mamie, whose perceptions were of the keenest. "See, Harold! Don't you remember the queer B's she used to make? And the T has a curl to it—such a queer curl!—and her R's are the strangest things that I ever saw. Brownie used to call them 'pigtails.'"

"Let me have it, daughter," said the Doctor; "and perhaps mamma would like for you to finish your supper."

Then he soon retired to his study. In a few moments, however, he reappeared, and called his wife and Harold to a consultation. They followed him to the study, and closed the door.

Harold was the first to speak: "Is the letter from Kate, father?"

His father nodded. He could not trust himself to speak.

"Oh! I felt sure that we would hear from



her soon," said his wife, cheerily, wheeling forward the great arm-chair and motioning to her husband to seat himself in it, while she occupied the little sofa. "Children are thoughtless about giving their parents the heartache—more thoughtless than wicked, I think. It isn't best to worry too much about these things. God is sufficient for even them."

"I know it, Lucia," said the Doctor; "but I don't see how I can be a father and not worry to some extent. To be sure, Kate is all right, and among friends, though not at Allen's. She writes me that they are very ill at his house, Harold."

"How long is she intending to stay, and where is she?" asked Harold.

"She is at Mrs. Knox's, at Clinton, and she is not coming home at all. She has ordered her trunk sent on to her, and she intends to get employment as a school teacher. I will not read you the letter; I do not see that it will do any good. What I wish is your counsel."

"Kate is so strange," said Harold, indignantly. "There is really no doing anything with her. She is so positive about everything. She won't reason a particle, but just rushes along in obedience to her feelings. If she had just thought over this calmly, she wouldn't have done this thing. I wouldn't have had it occur for anything, either. Everybody will be talking about it and asking questions. It is so humiliating."

"How would it do," suggested Mrs. Belmont, persuasively, "to take the first train in the morning, papa, and go and see her? Perhaps



a little coaxing might help matters wonderfully. Most girls like to be coaxed; and, perhaps if you can convince her, papa, that we love her, she may be induced to return with you. I wish she would."

Harold raised his eyes quickly, and gave his stepmother a searching look, as if he doubted the truth of her assertion. Then, turning to his father, he said: "I believe that to be a good suggestion, father; Kate will listen to you if to anybody, and I suppose it is right enough to try persuasion."

"Look in the *Gazette* and see when the train starts in the morning," said Mr. Belmont.

"Nine-thirty," said Harold, after glancing at the time-table. "Will you go, sir?"

"I think I will."

The next morning the anxious brother stood on the depot-platform and watched his father go steaming out upon his mission; and as he turned away to go to his daily work he breathed a prayer for the wayward sister who had left her home and friends.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### *A HARD HEART.*

KATE was sitting in the pleasant parlor at Mrs. Knox's trying to interest herself in a missionary magazine which her hostess had given her to read.

"I want you to attend our missionary meeting while you are here, Kate," she said, as she opened the book and laid it on her guest's lap. "There is an article on Japan I should like you to read. Put this bit of ribbon in to keep the place; and here is another about a poor old grey-headed woman in India who became a disciple of our blessed Jesus. Her trials were almost overwhelming—at least we would have considered them so; but her faith, simple and child-like, was perfectly astonishing. She saw Jesus in everything. I tell you, my dear, I felt rebuked when I read it. Sometimes it does seem to me that the heathen are going to enter into the kingdom ahead of us. But I have wandered away from our little society. It is a little society, of course; you could hardly expect anything else. There are only ten of us altogether, and very often there are only three or four in attendance; but we always manage to have a good time, especially when Edna can be there. She does us all good. Her knowledge is so extensive that it is a treat to hear her talk. But her school duties interfere so that she cannot often meet with us. I want you to meet Mrs.



Gwynne; I am sure you will feel drawn toward her; she is a little Welsh woman, the dearest little body. Just as full of spiritual fire as she can be, and wide awake on every subject. She came from the old country only a few years ago, and it is a little hard to understand all she says, but I always feel after hearing her talk as if I had had something good to eat. Then, you know, we make a habit of gathering all the interesting items we can, and we keep our mite-boxes on the mantel, and drop our pennies and nickels in whenever we feel that we have something special to thank God for; and very often we tell the history of them—have a kind of experience meeting, you know. We save all our literature, too, and send it off to needy fields, and we do a great deal of sewing, making over old garments and cutting out and making new ones. Last year we sent a box out West, which the missionaries said was worth fifty dollars to them. But, of course, my dear, you know all about missionary meetings. In as large place as Oakland you must have quite an army in motion. You must forgive my clatter, but I am so interested in all these good things.”

Kate assured her that she was very much interested in her account of the little society, and further made the remark that she had an idea that little Clinton was putting Oakland to shame, as it was, in comparison, doing the larger and grander work. She also spoke of Miss Richie, and hoped that she would meet her often.

“You shall,” said the little lady, emphatically. “I intend to endeavor my best to bring



you two together. She must spend the day with us to-morrow. I consider it a religious duty to get her out of her stuffy little boarding place as often as possible. And now, I must be off. There are sick folks in the village that I really must go to see," and the good woman bustled out of the room, and soon after Kate looked out of the window and saw her trudging briskly down the street with a large basket on her arm, containing tempting delicacies, and a big umbrella over her head; for it was snowing steadily and quite hard.

"I never saw such a woman," said she to herself, resuming her seat by the fire. "She thinks of nothing else except taking care of somebody. There's that woman and her children in the house, instead of a good, strong hired girl; and for nothing else, I know, than to keep them out of the infirmary. I don't believe in being too good. I think it is much more her duty to stay in out of the wet to-day, and take care of herself, than to be posting off after those sick folks. I haven't a single doubt but those people she thinks it her duty to visit would get on very well indeed without her, and I presume they have all that's good for them. I wouldn't do it. She will never get any thanks for it."

Poor Kate! With a vague discontent at her heart, she listlessly turned the leaves of the magazine, and tried to become interested in it, more because she feared Mrs. Knox might ask her some very bright, knowing questions about it than because she really wished to know anything about the people who were "sitting in



the darkness and shadow of death." But the effort was entirely unavailing, and with a tired, disgusted "Pshaw!" she threw it on the table, and turned away to the window.

Life was an exceedingly unpleasant thing to Kate this afternoon. She felt lonely and miserable, and though she would not have acknowledged it for anything, she was homesick. She longed for a sight of the old house that was dear to her from a thousand associations. She was tired enough of visiting already, and vainly wished for the old routine of work with which to while away the weary hours. The lonesome feeling deepened into an intense heartache, and the frown on her face grew darker as she mused over her situation.

"I don't see," she murmured, "how any one can believe that troubles and sorrows and things like that bring a person nearer to God. I am sure they never would me. If I believed for a moment, like some people pretend to, that God had sent all these hateful things upon me, I couldn't love him at all. There is something so awfully cruel and unjust about it. I *hate* such a doctrine."

Kate's face was dark with her clouded emotions, and she struck the window-sill with such force as to make the window rattle; but the next moment the flush died out of her face, leaving it pale and frightened; she drew in her breath hard, and trembled exceedingly; for some one had stopped at the gate, opened it, and was coming up the brick walk to the front door. Some one that Kate knew. Her father.

She sat down and, picking up the discarded



magazine, pretended to be very much occupied; so much so that she did not appear to notice Hetty until she had said the second time: "Miss Belmont, a gentleman to see you."

She looked up then, and in her heart of hearts she felt sorry. Her father stood before her, seeming to have grown old in two days' time. The old tender look was there in his eyes just as it had always been for her, but it was coupled with an expression of such deep and pitiful sorrow and reproach that Kate's eyes fell before it. It was like coals of fire to her when he wound a loving arm about her and tenderly kissed her, saying: "My dear daughter; my dear, dear Kate." Mr. Belmont's voice shook; he could say no more.

"Why did you come?" Kate asked, recovering herself, and drawing away from his embrace.

"Didn't you expect I would?" taking the chair she offered him, and seating himself. "My dear child, there was nothing else to do."

"I wish you had let me alone," exclaimed Kate, passionately. "You know very well that I cannot live with you any longer, and you know why. I stayed just as long as I could, and a great deal longer than I should—a great deal longer than I was wanted, too."

"My darling, you are so mistaken," said her father, with a sad smile. "You are not led by the Spirit of the Master in reaching these conclusions. I fear that you have wilfully misunderstood Mrs. Belmont and her children. They did not come into our home to drive you out; nothing could be farther from their thoughts. My wife has been exceedingly anxious from the



first to concede everything, and I am sure Nellie is the very soul of amiability and gentleness."

"Oh! of *course*!" exclaimed Kate, sneeringly. "I have no doubt they are all perfection in your eyes—perfect angels! I don't suppose they could do anything wrong if they tried."

Mr. Belmont did not answer this outburst for some minutes, but sat, if possible, a little straighter in his chair, and looked gravely at his tempest of a daughter, who grew more and more uneasy under the steady glance, and finally broke into tears. Then he spoke: "My dear," said he very gently, "you have wandered very far away from the right path. I cannot believe that it is my own good daughter Kate that I find hiding in her secret heart such bitter, bitter thoughts of me."

"I can't help what you think," she sobbed, softening a little under the influence of his tenderness, but yet resisting with all her might. "It don't seem right in me to forget my own dear mother who is lying in the cemetery, and take a stranger to my bosom in her place. I am too true to her to do it, no matter what you or any one else may think of me."

"You are not asked to do it, Kate, and your reason tells you so this minute," said her father, gravely. "I, above all others, desire you to remember your own mother with constant and imperishable affection; but I do desire you to respect my present wife, and I thought that you loved *me* too well to refuse to do that, darling."

Kate did not answer, and Mr. Belmont went



on: "Mrs. Belmont desired me to entreat you to return home, at least, as soon as you have visited long enough. I wish you would go back with me to-day. Our household is not complete without you. Overcome your foolish pride, my love, and return, and make up your mind to be happy, and make others so. I do not think, Katie, that it is necessary for me to assure you of our affection, but if so, I will say we all love you—we want you. Will you not come?"

For a moment Kate wavered. The thought of home and her father's sweet protection came over her like a flood, and threatened to overwhelm her for the time. But again she resisted, and again her heart hardened.

"No," she said; "I did right to come away; I know I did, and I may as well stay away now."

Again an interval of silence. Mr. Belmont was angry, and according to custom, he very rarely spoke when in an unusual heat. When at last he did speak, his voice was as soft and low and gentle as a woman's.

"It is a matter of great regret, Katie, that you have chosen the course you have, I think. I believe you will come in course of time to regret it yourself. But, my dear daughter, if you will not take any one's counsel, experience must be your teacher, and a very severe one it is sometimes, too. However, if you are resolved to become her pupil, I do not know that it is my duty to interfere further. I will only say, darling, that I wish that I could feel that the Lord is with you, and, if at any time you should



regret it, and want to come back to papa, I hope you will remember that there is always a 'light in the window for you.' But I do wish I could prevail upon you to return with me now."

Again the softened feeling struggling in her breast, and again the resistance and hardening. "No," said she, "I will not."

"Not for the children's sake—not for mine?"

"No; I am not going to sacrifice myself; I've done everything for the children and got no thanks for it, and I'm done with them. I have about made up my mind never to care for anybody any more."

A deep sigh broke from the anxious father's breast. "Oh, if the Lord would only soften that hard heart of yours, my daughter;" then, rising, he laid a roll of bank-bills on the table, bent down and took her in his arms, kissing her tenderly, and the next moment he had left the house, and Kate found herself sitting solitary and alone, with a heart which felt like a stone in her bosom.



## CHAPTER XV.

### *MAMIE'S PARTY.*

THE children stood at the south window talking earnestly together in whispers. It was a lovely morning. The weather had moderated to an unusual degree, making the air, for the time, quite balmly and spring-like, and the sun shone in warm and bright at the south window of the sitting-room.

Mrs. Belmont was busy tidying up the sitting-room, and smiled on the little whisperers as she pushed the sweeper near their little feet, and gave them each an affectionate pat; but she did not ask them for their secret, but went on singing the verse of a little hymn that was very dear to her.

“Nearer the bound of life,  
Where burdens are laid down,  
Nearer to laying down the cross,  
Nearer to wearing the crown.”

“Why do you sing that particular verse so much, mamma?” asked Elinor from her cozy corner by the fireside, where her pale, thin hands were busily fashioning a slumber-robe out of bright wools. “I always notice that you sing that one so much more than another, and you seem to get so much enjoyment out of it. You look extremely happy at any rate, though you are an especially happy-looking mamma any way.”

The habitual tender smile on Mrs. Belmont's



face beamed brightly on her young daughter, as she replied: "I am a happy mamma, and I ought to be. God has given me such a glorious trust to fulfil—such a beautiful garden of immortelles to cultivate for him. But about the verse, my darling. Somehow that verse of that precious hymn of Phœbe Carey's, which has doubtless been the means of lifting up thousands of burdened hearts, always has been, and is to-day, a special comfort to my soul. It takes all the worries out, and I can endure life's hardships better when reminded of the fact that I am one day nearer my Father's house on high. I think, my precious daughter, that we count too much on having a good time in this world, when it isn't the world to have a good time in. The cross is the burden which this world lays upon us; we are obliged to carry it whether or no. I wonder we are so slow to believe the words of Christ, 'In this world ye shall have tribulation.'"

"Mamma," asked Nellie, softly, "isn't the cross you are bearing now almost insupportable? I should think you would feel as if you *must* lay that down."

"Not yet," said the mother brightly, "not till I feel sure, Nellie dear, that I have won these souls as stars for my crown. It is too soon yet, my darling, to despair.

'There's a wideness in God's mercy,  
Like the wideness of the sea.'

He has given me this field of labor, and if it needs a great deal of patient cultivation to make it productive, I need not be dismayed, or even surprised. I know there will be a harvest by-



and-by. I feel confident that there are hidden riches in my field of labor, that will grow up into evergreen life and burst into wonderful bloom by-and-by."

"Blessed mother!" exclaimed Nellie, softly; "your faith is like a rock. Sometimes it seems to me that you have a real tangible hold on Christ. Even now, when our domestic sky is so cloudy, you can go on serenely, smiling away as if there was nothing to worry about.

"Well," said Mrs. Belmont, brushing the hearth with a little whisk broom, "there isn't anything to worry about in reality. If, as the Bible says, 'All things work together for good to them that love God,' why should we worry? If the trials and tribulations of life are to work into eternal glory, we should be glad of a superabundance of troubles, for the more sorrow the more joy, you know; the heavier the cross, the brighter and more resplendent the crown. Jesus tells us it is our duty to rejoice in tribulation, and I believe we ought to; if only I could always do it. My dear, my faith is not so much like a rock as it may seem to you. Say, rather, that it is founded upon a rock."

"It is not so hard, mamma, knowing all this, for me to say something which it has been on my mind to say to you a great while. It has been impressed upon me very often of late, dear mamma, that I shall not live to be a woman. Do you know, mamma, that I very much wish that I may not. I do so dread being a helpless burden on my friends, that is a cross that it does seem that I cannot bear; and it will be such a comfort for me to go.



You must have seen, mamma, of course you know, that I am not exactly welcome here, that is, not as welcome as I might be, anyway, and it seems to crush all the heart right out of me, and make me long to die."

Mrs. Belmont turned her face away for a moment, but when she turned it towards her daughter again, it wore the same sweet, bright smile it had all the morning.

"There are some flowers," said she, "that breathe the greater fragrance for being crushed. I have seen my lily of the valley drooping her head; I have seen my flower fading, and I have been trying to say the Lord's own prayer, 'Thy will, not mine be done.'"

"You know, dear mamma," continued Nellie, "that I have the seeds of lingering consumption in my blood; papa died of it. I remember that dreadful cough of his as far back as I can remember; and, mamma, I have a cough that you have been trying to doctor for some time."

"I know it, my darling. It is like the knell of tolling bells in mamma's ears."

"Doctoring it will do no good, mamma, precious mamma," said the girl, laying down her work and winding her clinging arms about her mother's neck; "my voice is failing; I could hardly sustain my part on Christmas Eve, and I shall never sing that way again. Still, mamma, I may stay a long time to be your burdensome comfort yet."

Mrs. Belmont hushed her with a tearful kiss.

"So, mamma," said she, "I have my cross to bear, too, and I shall need to learn Miss Carey's song myself, and if it should be that I



cannot sing it with my voice, I shall always, I hope, be able to sing it in my heart."

Meanwhile, the little girl and boy were still busy whispering in the sunny south window. Mamie seemed to be urging Brownie to do something which, for some reason, he was not inclined to do.

"Oh! no, Mamie," he whispered plaintively, "I don't want to. I would so much raver you would."

"But I want you to, Brownie," insisted Mamie, with a little imperious frown. "It's better for you to ask her than me, cause it's for me, and you're the littlest, and, I guess she likes you the best, anyway. Go on, now, that's a good boy."

"Oh! no, Mamie," pleaded the little fellow, "not dust now. She's talking to Nellie, she is."

"You're a real naughty little brother," whispered Mamie, very much displeased, "and I shan't be able to love you half so well. I think you might do it, for you always share in every nice time I have; you know you do."

"Why can't us both go, Mamie?" asked the dear little boy, slipping his hand into his sister's coaxingly. "We can, can't us?"

"Why, no," replied Mamie, impatiently. "It wouldn't look half so well. You just go right up to her and tell her that Kate—no, I wouldn't say that, either; that I always have a little birthday party, and to-day's the day. That's all. It's as easy as anything. Run along, now. Don't wait another minute."

But the little fellow did wait several minutes, and it took a good deal more urging before he



finally consented to slowly, oh, so very slowly, cross the room with his little fat forefinger in his mouth, and his eyes fixed upon his dainty little feet. Having arrived at the end of his journey, which was directly in front of his step-mother, he began with a little tremble in his voice: "Mamie and I always has a little party on our birfday, don't us, Mamie?" with an appealing look at the little sister.

"On *mine*," emphasized Mamie, drawing near, now that the subject was introduced. "Kate always made me a little party on my birthday because mamma did, and Brownie always comes, of course, because he's my brother, and lives here; but he's the only boy that comes."

"Yes," said Brownie, nodding his pretty head encouragingly, "dust me; 'at's all."

"And when is your birthday, darling" asked Mrs. Belmont, winding an arm about the little girl and clasping the boy's dimpled hand, while she bent her smiling eyes upon them.

"To-day," said Mamie, and "To-day," echoed Brownie, with a cunning smack of his lips as he added, by way of making things plain, that they always had a frosted cake and a whole lot of cinnamon pies—"ittle teenty bits of ones."

"Well, now," said Mrs. Belmont, "what a mamma I am, to be sure, to be so unprepared for my children's birthdays! I shall take care that it does not happen again. But this is Saturday, and such a busy Saturday. Nellie, can you help me out?"

"Maybe they would like a taffy-pulling," suggested Nellie, pausing in her work. "Al-



most all children enjoy them, and we could manage to have it very early in the evening, after the work is done."

"Oh! that will be splendid—just like big folks!" exclaimed Mamie, rapturously. "I'll go and invite the girls right away."

"Whom do you have, my dear?" asked Mrs. Belmont.

"Why, I always have the Custer girls; but I forgot—they're all gone away; and Bessie Temple, but she's sick; and Myrtle Budd is mad with me. There won't be anybody to come, after all."

"Why, that's bad," said the mother, kindly, giving the disappointed face a kiss; "but I wonder if we can't fix it. How would my girlie like one of Christ's kind of parties? Do you remember what he says about it in the Bible?"

"No, ma'am."

"He tells us that when we make a party, we ought to invite lame folks and blind folks, and those who have no nice things to eat. Now, I have seen a good many little girls, right here in our Sunday-school, who look as if they had never been to a taffy-pulling in their lives. How would you like to invite them, my darling?"

"Do you mean such folks as the Beech girls that Kate used to give my old clothes to?" asked Mamie. "Why, they never were here in their lives, and they look just like beggars."

"Don't you know that we are all beggars?" asked her mother, softly. "God's beggars, Mamie, dependent upon his bounty for everything that we have in the world. Jesus was especially



the friend of the poor when he was on earth, and I thought that my little Mamie would enjoy doing them a kindness for his sake."

Mamie looked abashed; her face flushed.

"Why, I would like to do it, real well," said she, hesitatingly, "only it seems queer, because nobody else does it."

"I fink it would be bootiful, dust bootiful!" said Brownie, in high excitement. "Le's ask Letty Baker, too, Mamie, 'cause she's weal lame and walks wiv a stick, and she papa drinks whicksey, and never do give her any cinnamon pies at all. Harry say so."

"Well," said Mamie, "we will, and I'll ask those Dustan girls. They never do have anything, hardly. If only Clyde was here to help me with the invitations!"

At this opportune moment Clyde came in, and very obligingly consented to help in any way desired; so, within a few minutes, all was hurry and bustle.

"We'll have to manage the frosted cake and cinnamon pies in some way," said Mrs. Belmont to Nellie; "Brownie's heart is set upon them."

The Belmont house was alive with children that evening—children with worn shoes and faded dresses, but with the gladdest, happiest faces and hearts that you ever saw; and Mrs. Belmont was the greatest child of them all, helping them play blindfold and hide-the-thimble with all the ardor of her evergreen youth, while Mr. Belmont stirred the taffy, and Harold and Nellie dipped it into saucers and showed them how to pull it until it was white and glis-



tening. In a word, the party after Christ's pattern did good and was an unbounded success. Above all, it taught Mamie a lesson which she never forgot. For the first time in her life, she had tried to do a practical good in the name of Jesus, and she experienced a happiness that was altogether new to her. She even declared that she would always give invitations to those who could not repay her again. "For," she whispered to her mamma, as she tucked her into her little bed, "I know now what those words mean, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive,' and I think, like Brownie, that it is 'dust bootiful.' "



## CHAPTER XVI.

### *WARD IN TROUBLE.*

“**W**HERE does Ward spend his evenings?” was the anxious inquiry of Dr. Belmont, as he looked up from his newspaper, one stormy evening, and glanced around the room at the family group. There was mother seated in the low rocker with Brownie’s fair curls afloat upon her shoulder, engaged in the fascinating employment of story-telling; Nellie was at the piano trying to teach Mamie and Clyde a new song; and the clang of the hall-door announced the arrival of Harold from the store; but where was Ward? This was becoming a troublesome question to them all, and an extremely anxious one to Dr. Belmont, his wife, and Harold. In fact, the boy was getting more and more unapproachable. The sullen reserve of his face seemed to be deepening each day, and the children missed the old-fashioned teasing they were used to from brother Ward.

Mrs. Belmont had her thoughts about what *might* be, regarding his whereabouts, but she had no proof of their truth, and she was not the woman to give voice to unpleasant suspicions, and she dreaded to add anything more to the already burdened heart of the weary pastor. Besides, this good Christian woman had an unbounded faith in prayer, and was she not putting up special petitions in behalf of



this boy whose heart was turned against her with the very bitterness of death? Meanwhile, Kate's friend, Lucy Ransom, was watching, together with her mother and Aunt Sarah Bush, with eagle eyes the daily life of the Belmonts, and drawing her own conclusions, the result of which was letters of condolence to Kate, in which it was confidently stated that her poor, dear brother Ward was allowed in the house hardly long enough to take his meals, and that if he was driven to the bad, there would be no one to thank for it except that miserable stepmother; and Mrs. Belmont knew there were unpleasant remarks made about her. She felt it in the atmosphere of the church, and perceived it in the indignant side-glances cast in her direction, and hidden in the anxious queries regarding Kate; but though all this hurt, it did not move her in the least; and no one would have known from her outward bearing that her inward serenity was in the least disturbed. Above all, she was extremely anxious that her husband should not get hold of these reports. For his sake the domestic sea must be an unruffled one, and so she answered in her usual bright, cheery way: "Ward is just enjoying an evening out with some of the boys, George. You musn't forget that you were a boy yourself, once, and that the outside world had charms for you. I am afraid you are growing old."

Brownie raised his golden head from its resting-place, and turned to meet his father's troubled eyes.

"I sawed him an' Jud Taylor out in the



wood-shed when I goed to get chips for breakfast, an' Jud, he say to Ward 'at he mus' go wiv him to Fwyetzes to play. An' Ward, he say he have no money, an' 'nen Jud, he say he know where to get some."

Brownie's story caused quite a sensation, which Mrs. Belmont strove to quell in vain. "I presume he has some little scheme on hand," said she, lightly. "Boys are always having their little secrets, you know, and want to be trying all sorts of experiments. Clyde, here, has already emptied his pocket-book two or three times trying to make magic-lanterns and steam-engines, and one thing and another."

Harold, who had come in in time to catch the drift of the conversation, bent a searching look on his stepmother. Her calm, quiet, smiling, untroubled face bore no evidence of the ache in her anxious soul; and Harold wondered, with just a touch of scorn and bitterness in his heart, whether she could dismiss the case so lightly if the boy had been hers by right of birth. Then he turned to his father, saying: "I think, sir, it may be as well to let the young gentleman answer for himself. He can, probably, furnish better information regarding his evening pastimes than any other member of the family." This was very sarcastic for Harold.

"Yes," returned Dr. Belmont, folding his paper, "that is, if he *will*. But you know yourself, Harry, that Ward is a strange boy. His mother was the only one whom he ever seemed especially to care for, and who had any lasting influence over him. He seems perverse, and more, he really seems to delight in being so. I



have spoken to him a number of times in regard to his evenings out, but I cannot get any satisfaction out of him. He puts me off with some plausible excuse or another; and I think that he resents my inquiring into what, at his age, a boy is apt to consider his own affairs alone. I acknowledge that his resentment has made me somewhat slow about insisting upon knowing the whole truth, for I do not want to drive the boy away from me; but I really must try to look into these things. I am beginning to be afraid that everything is not just what it should be. Who is this Jud Taylor, Harold?"

"Zack Taylor's boy. He lives just around the corner, on Oak street. You know the old gentleman well enough."

"Well, what kind of a boy is Jud?"

Harold was standing before the fire drying his feet and picking his teeth. He set down his foot firmly and with something of irritation as he replied: "He is a boy that I haven't any use for."

Mr. Belmont turned quickly.

"Do you mean that he is not a good boy?" he inquired, anxiously.

"He is not what I should call a good boy," returned Harold, reluctantly. "Of course I don't know anything especially about him, only reports that I have heard; but it seems to me that his looks are enough for anybody."

"What kind of a place is this Fritz's, where Brownie said they were going to play; and what sort of games do they indulge in there; and why is money required? I don't like the



looks of that," persisted the minister, anxiously.

"Well," said Harold, again quite reluctantly, "Fritz's is what the fellows call the 'Monkey Ranch.' It's a place of amusement down street. I was never in there, to be sure, but I have been told that they play ninepins and cards, and I believe that they have a small pool-table in there. Will Kingsley was drawn in there the other evening by a set of fellows, and he told me, when he came out, that it 'was the awfulest place he ever was in.' But then, of course, you know how Kingsley has been brought up—just as tenderly as a baby. He has never seen anything outside of the home circle, hardly."

"And he is a better young man because of it—much better," said his father, who was a firm believer in the protection of home, and who dreaded the vices of the world for his children almost as much as a woman would do. "Do you know, Harry, whether they gamble over these games or not?"

"They are not supposed to, sir; but when the police are far enough away, I wouldn't trust their honor very far. They manage to spend money on them some way, at any rate. Those who lose at ninepins are obliged to pay a certain sum, I understand; and the lookers-on bet on the cards and pool-players, if there are not any regular stakes."

"And, of course," said the minister, with considerable indignation, "I understand, and you do also, that that is no place for Ward to spend his evenings. A boy of his brain sub-



mitting himself to trash like that! I never expected a boy of mine to meddle with cards or anything of that kind. And, aside from its being an injury to him, look how it will hurt my influence! How can a minister hope to be successful in saving other people's boys when his own boy is walking in the broad way as fast as his feet can carry him? I don't suppose that I am fit to bring up children. Couldn't you try to do something with him, Harold?"

"He won't listen to me," said Harold, dropping into a chair. "I have talked to him ever so many times, but, as you say, he seems to resent it. He is young, too, to be declaring his independence, it seems to me."

"Yes," said his father; "it must certainly be seen to. I have so much crowding upon me! The president of the college wants me to preach to the students Sunday afternoon, but I do not see how I am to do it; and there is that temperance lecture at the city hall that I have to deliver Thursday evening, and here it is Tuesday, and I am not half prepared yet. I really have not time to do justice to my family. I must try to get to the bottom of this business of Ward's, however, and put a stop to it. I am very much distressed over it."

At this moment there came a decided ring at the door-bell, and Harold ushered in two brother-ministers, who had called to arrange for certain union meetings in behalf of the city. In discussing these spiritual matters, the domestic affair which had occupied the mind of the good Doctor when they came in was completely obliterated. They stayed until a late



hour; and as Harold went up to bed at about half-past ten o'clock, he said to himself, with a sigh: "Father will not think of Ward again for a month. He is so swallowed up with these religious movements—and no one can blame him, I'm sure—that he hasn't time to look after his family; it is just as he says. He is as good a father as ever was, too; but he isn't fit to manage Ward. Ward will be going off, just as Kate did, some of these days, and dear knows how it will all end."

And yet Harold had not the courage to lay his strong young hand on the boyish heart of his brother and lead him to Jesus for the salvation that he so much needed. How strange it was that this young man, who was one of the most efficient leaders in the Y. P. S., whose voice was heard in prayer and testimony every Sunday evening, and who found it a comparatively easy thing to talk to the dying souls around him, should lack the courage to rescue his own brother, who was sweeping so swiftly towards the rapids in the river of life! True, he had talked to him sometimes—even tried to expostulate with him—but he had not laid hold of his brother's soul and held on to it, as he had done many others; and it was because he was the weaker and more timid nature of the two, and dreaded an encounter with Ward's caustic tongue.

And how about the stepmother? Had she done anything to win this soul for Christ, aside from the prayers she had put up in her closet? Well, if looking after his comfort, consulting his table tastes, and spending money for inter-



esting books, pleasant pictures, and intellectual games to scatter about his room, were anything; she was constant and untiring in her efforts; she even went beyond this, and invited in young company, furnished them with the nicest refreshments, and got up nice little musical entertainments to tempt the boy to love her and his home, instead of evil companions and the street, and yet, with quiet, cool, and scornful disdain Ward shut the door after him night after night, and walked off down town without a word. More than this, he had become very irregular in his attendance at both Sunday-school, and at high-school during the week, so that he had been complained of by his teachers more than once.

The next morning, before they had arisen from their slumbers, a messenger came for Dr. Belmont to attend the funeral of a valued friend some distance away. He had only time to eat a hurried breakfast and get to the depot in time for the train. Harold, too, who travelled considerably in the interests of the house with which he was connected, was obliged to leave that morning on a three-days' trip, so that Mrs. Belmont was left alone with the children, three of whom, Ward, Clyde, and Mamie, attended school.

It was ten o'clock, and she was in the kitchen preparing dessert for dinner, when the door-bell rang violently. Hastily laying aside her apron, she went to see what was wanted, for she never left Nellie to answer the bell. To her surprise, she found awaiting her upon the door-step, Mr. Warner, a merchant with whom



she had traded a good deal since coming to Oakland, and who was a member in her husband's church; with him was a police official.

"Mrs. Belmont, good-morning. I am very sorry to intrude. Could we see the Doctor a few moments on very pressing business?" Mr. Warner spoke regretfully.

"I am sorry to be obliged to say no," said Mrs. Belmont. "He was called out of the city and won't be back before to-morrow some time. Will you not come in?"

Mr. Warner turned to the officer and said something in a low tone. The latter seemed to suggest something, and the old gentleman turned to Mrs. Belmont quickly. "We will see Harold at the store. That will, probably, answer the purpose."

"I am very sorry, but Harold has gone on one of his trips for the firm," said Mrs. Belmont. Then she asked with some hesitation: "Is it anything I can do?"

Mr. Warner looked at her pityingly. He stroked his long grey beard thoughtfully; then he turned to the officer with, "What do you think, English?"

"She might want to stop proceedings," said the officer. "If you don't care to prosecute, there's a chance."

"Well, then, Mrs. Belmont, if you think you can do anything to help matters, we will confide our business to you. No, no, we will stay right here in the hall. We will not detain you a minute. You must know, Mrs. Belmont, that this officer stumbled upon a boy's gambling-den this morning. It was in an old unused



barn on South street. The mayor has been suspicious of some such thing for a good while, but he was unprepared to find that every boy engaged in the nefarious business were sons of our most respectable citizens. The mayor, as well as the parents of the lads, would like to keep the whole thing a secret if they can; at any rate, names will be suppressed if proper precautions can be used. The little fellows were all arrested, of course, and are subject to a fine and costs. They are to have their hearing before the mayor at eleven o'clock. I am dreadfully sorry, Mrs. Belmont, but your husband's son Ward was among them, and we want to give him a chance. I wish this was all, but it is not. I missed a sum of money last evening from my cash-drawer when I went to remove it to the safe to lock it up for the night, and inquiries brought to light the fact that the clerk in the store next door to me recognized a couple of boys hanging around my back door about supper time. Those boys were Ward and the Taylor boy. I entered my complaint to the police and part of the money was found on the Taylor boy. Ward confessed that he had gambled his entirely away. It seems that the boys have been quite in the habit of purloining small sums here and there in order to make new ventures and pay up their losses, and I guess these two had got in pretty deep. Now, my dear lady, I am the Doctor's friend. The whole business is bad enough without my making it worse. The sum I lost is not a great one, only about thirty dollars. If you wish to, and can pay Ward's share of it,



and appear before the mayor when the boy has his hearing and pay the fine and costs, it will be all right. I don't want to see the boy go to jail, and the public need never know, as the newspapers will be carefully instructed to suppress all names."

A great wave of thankfulness swept through Mrs. Belmont's heart, as she reflected that her husband and Harold need never know what had happened. Taking Mr. Warner aside, she begged him never to let the matter reach their ears, as she trusted that this would prove a salutary lesson to Ward; then selecting a roll of bills from her own little private income, she told Nellie to set a lunch on the table for the children, and took the Madison-avenue car for the mayor's office.



## CHAPTER XVII.

### *TAKING ROOT.*

**A**S Mrs. Belmont's stately form crossed the threshold of the mayor's office, Ward, who was under examination, and who answered the mayor's questions in a hardened, reckless manner, caught sight of her, and a perfectly ferocious look crept over his face, and he ground his teeth with rage. The mayor, who was disposed to be severe, saw the change in his countenance, and attributed it to the proper cause.

"Young man," said he, impressively, "do you know what the officers of the law do with insubordinate boys? If the counsels and admonitions of parents are not heeded, we have a place to send them, where they will be obliged to do what is right, whether they will or not. Do you understand what I mean?"

Ward thrust his hands into his pockets, and faced the mayor in insulting silence.

"The work-house and the reform farm are not places which would suit your taste very well, I dare say," continued the mayor; "but let me tell you that when boys like you throw off all home restraint and affection, and become public nuisances, that's exactly where we put them. Can you pay your fine, sir? Five dollars and costs."

Until now, Ward had tried to brave it out with his usual reckless courage; but there was



not a penny in his pocket, and at the prospect of remaining in jail for the night, and until either Harold or his father should return and appear for him; of having the disgraceful truth known that he had committed a theft to get the money with which to gamble; worst of all, to make it possible for his hated stepmother to crow over him and to say, in triumph, that she had never expected anything better of him; to bow his father's head in grief and tears—for Ward yet had some heart left—oh! it was too much! He grew as pallid as if death had overtaken him, and, choked by his strong feelings, he shook his head hopelessly in reply to the mayor's question.

His evident emotion touched the mayor's heart.

"I am sorry that you have no one to appear for you," he said, "but our rules are the same always. You will have to be remanded until the sum is paid."

Just then a lawyer who stood by the side of Mr. Warner stepped forward, with the words: "His stepmother appears in his behalf, your Honor. She is ready to pay the fine and costs, and to stop the prosecution by responding to Mr. Warner's terms—the restoration of the balance of the stolen money."

"Very well," said the mayor; "I am glad to hear it." Then, turning to the boys in custody, he said: "You are all free, then, for this time; but let me catch you in such a trespass again, and I shall see that you are punished to the full extent of the law. You have been mercifully shielded this time from open disgrace. Let us



hope that it may be a lesson to you for life." And with these words the case was dismissed.

Mrs. Belmont returned home determined that not one of the family should know from her what had happened that morning. She had come to know that her husband's power of government was small in his own household, and that, instead of Ward being afraid of him, he rather disliked to have an encounter with Ward; and she hoped that the lesson which the boy had received might prove a salutary one. So she went home, and, shutting herself in her room, poured her complaint into her Father's ear, and rolled the burden off upon the sympathizing heart of Jesus.

She did not expect any immediate results from the action of the morning. She had simply done what seemed a mother's duty, and she hoped that it might do good. It was not this woman's way to worry over the results of her labor. She felt—believed to the full—that she was a co-worker with God, the Lord of the harvest; and that, though she might plant, from him must come the increase. She knew, with that lively faith which is the "substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," that no Christian labor is "in vain in the Lord."

She was somewhat surprised, therefore, when Ward's shuffling step sounded upon the brick walk, and he came in at the side door; and she was almost startled when, instead of going to his room in sullen, solitary silence, he entered the sitting-room.

"Where is your mother?" he asked of Nellie.



"She has just gone out into the kitchen, I think," Nellie answered, looking up, with a bright, sisterly smile, from her crocheting. "Brownie, dear, will you run and tell mamma that Brother Ward is asking for her?"

Brownie started at once, for he was always very obedient to Sister Nellie's sweet wishes; but his brother's voice stopped him.

"Hold on!" it said; "you needn't call her in here; I'll go out where she is."

Ward walked out in a half-ashamed, hesitating way, and yet with a defiant air of stolid determination that was characteristic of the boy, and had been from his babyhood. His hand trembled violently as he took hold of the knob of the kitchen door, but he turned it resolutely, opened the door, and closed it firmly behind him. Then he spoke without a moment's delay.

"I have come to thank you for what you did for me this morning." His proud lip quivered, but he shut his mouth firmly as if to repress all visible signs of emotion.

"My dear boy," replied Mrs. Belmont, "don't say another word. I was so glad to do it. Papa and Harold were both away, and, of course, it was the most natural thing in the world for me to do just as I did."

Ward gulped down the feelings which arose in his throat, and raised a pair of eyes to his stepmother's face out of which the resentful look she had been used to seeing there had faded. He tried once or twice to say something, but his voice was untrustworthy. At last he murmured in a low, stifled tone: "I had no reason to expect you to do it, not the least



in the world. When I saw you come into the mayor's office, I supposed you had come to testify against me and show me up in my worst colors. If I had been in your place, that's about what I should have done."

"My dear boy," she began, but he raised his hand and stopped her.

"Of course, you know," he went on in his slow, deliberate, forceful manner, "that I have been just as mean to you and yours as I dared to be. Of course, you know why, because, to be sure, you presumed to take my mother's place. I feel that I owe it to you, now, to say that I am sorry, and that I beg your pardon. I do not say that I will ever call you mother. I swore beside her grave that I never would call any other woman that. But I intend to do the honorable thing after this and treat you respectfully. You have saved me from disgrace, anyway, to-day, and I shall never forget it, never!"

"My dear Ward," and this time he did not stop her, even when her loving arm stole around his neck and she gently drew him into a chair. "Now, tell me all about it, my dear," said she, "it will ease that heavy heart of yours;" for he had buried his face in his hands and was weeping.

"I've just tried to throw myself away ever since mother died," he sobbed, "no one else seemed to care two cents for me, and I got in with some of the fellows who were in the habit of going to the Monkey Ranch for a good time, and I got to going with them. I learned to play pool and cards and nine-pins and pretty



soon I got to gambling for small sums, and if I won I'd treat to cigarettes or something of that kind. I won pretty often, and I couldn't see any great harm in it, and I got so that I liked to play better than anything. Many a time when you thought I was at school, I was with a lot of fellows in that old barn where the cops caught us, playing cards; and I wrote excuses in father's name to the teacher, and so slid along. I never meant to steal, though, and I didn't exactly. Jud took the money and lent me half. I told him I thought we were big fools for doing that, and, of course, we were consummate fools; but we were dead sure of winning a lot last night, and then Jud meant to return it, how I don't know. Now, you know all. The worst of it all is father must know, and it will just kill him!"

"Perhaps it would be just as kind to papa and Harold if you and I kept this our own secret," said Mrs. Belmont, gently. "It is not necessary that they should know, is it?"

"But the money you paid for me," said Ward, "that will have to be accounted for. I know papa. He is very particular about his money matters."

"My dear, I did not use his money. It was simply some money the Lord and I have on deposit for doing good. We are going to lend it to you until you can make an honest return."

Ward stared at her in amazement. He tried to speak, but his feelings would not let him. Mrs. Belmont smoothed his rough, tumbled hair, talking brightly and lovingly the while. "Dear boy," said she, "the loving mother up



in heaven is not lost to you. She is with you still. Her desires for you to be a good man are going to be realized. You will not disappoint her. You will begin again and build up a solid character. Let me ask you to build on Jesus, the unmovable Rock. Ward, be a Christian! Make up your mind, my dear, to meet your mother in the happy home we call heaven."

Ward wiped his eyes in a fierce, hurried way. "I cannot promise that," said he, "I'll promise never to visit that old Monkey Ranch again, and I'll try to drop Jud and the cards, but I can't promise to be a Christian. I don't know that I shall ever be one. Don't talk to me of my mother. I can't bear to think," he stopped abruptly. When he spoke again it was in his natural voice. "Will you be kind enough to write an excuse for me to the teacher? She will expect me to account for being absent this morning and late this afternoon."

Mrs. Belmont went to a little drawer where she kept tablet and pencil for the purpose of writing grocery orders, and in a moment the excuse was in his hand.

"I shall make it a point not to be obliged to ask for a second favor of this kind," said he, with a grave bow. "Very many thanks," and with that he withdrew.

After school that night Clyde was very much astonished to find Ward mending a much-valued sled of his which had been broken for some time, and for lack of which he had been obliged to lose much of the fine coasting. But



when he approached him with his hearty thanks, Ward only handed him the sled and went off without a word.

"But he looked ever so kind," said the small boy, in recounting the transaction to his mother, "and I shouldn't wonder if I liked him real well."

"I think something is growing in Ward's heart," said his mother, giving his pretty cheek a kiss.

She was right. Something was growing in Ward's heart. Something good and blessed. The seed she had sown there that morning was charity or love, and it had already taken root.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### *CLYDE'S RESCUE.*

IT was nearing the latter half of February, and already the icy breath of winter was beginning to melt in anticipation of the coming spring. The snow, of which there had been a great abundance, was getting soft, and in the middle of the road was forming an unpleasant slush, and the thick ice in the rivers and streams was beginning to break up. Seeing it rapidly showing symptoms of disappearing altogether, the young people, of course, were making the most of it; and, out of school hours, every hill about Oakland of any size at all was crowded with people of from seven to twenty-seven years of age. Adjoining the high-school building was a long hill known as "Jones' Point," which ran down gradually into the river Blee, whose waters had been, for six weeks, so securely bound as to afford a most splendid skating-ground for the pupils, a large number of whom gathered on its smooth surface day after day. As the coasters came flying down Jones' Point with the speed of the wind, and across the glassy river, there was, once in a while, a collision between them and the skaters, though guards were generally placed at the crossing to warn the parties on the ice in time to prevent a catastrophe. Usually, these affairs were treated very pleasantly, and the boys put up with their broken sleds



and bruised heads as a necessary evil. Ward being a junior, and Clyde in the A grammar grade of the same building, they often met on this play-ground; and the school was pretty well acquainted with the elder boy's antipathy to the younger, though no words had ever passed between them; Ward simply passing his stepbrother by with the cool disdain of a superior, and acting as if the boy were wholly unknown to him.

One beautiful afternoon, two or three days after Ward's trial before the mayor, the usual number were gathered upon the hill and the river, Ward and Clyde among them. Clyde was the animated centre of a group of boys on top of the hill, and in an excited voice was explaining to them the cunning workmanship of the repairs to his sled, which Ward had made.

"I tell you what it is," said he, a gladsome light illumining his very pretty face, "Ward's all O. K. when he's good-natured. I like him first-rate—almost better than Harold, and he's fine. I shouldn't wonder if we should get to be friends, after all. I wish we could, for I think it's mean not to speak to each other—minister's boys, too!"

There was something very strange about it, but Clyde had always very much admired his stepbrother Ward. There was something about his independent, daring, reckless manner; his sharp, cutting, sarcastic retorts; his black, piercing eyes, which charmed the little boy, and caused him to regard Ward with a kind of delighted awe. He had an undefined idea that there was the making of something



perfectly splendid in the strange, wilful boy, and often felt the wish forming within him to be like him, without, as he phrased it, "being mean."

"Well," said one of the boys, examining the sled in a critical manner, "I haven't much use for Ward Belmont, myself; but he hasn't done a bad job on your sled. Let me try her and see how she goes. May I?"

"Certainly," said Clyde, "as many times as you like." And away sped the boy down the hill and across the ice, amid the shouts and cheers of his companions.

"I tell you what let's do, fellows," said Clyde, in his energetic, busy way; "let's form a train, a lightning express, and all go down together, and across to the big rock on the other side of the Blee, in a line. I'll be the engineer and go first; the fellow behind me can fasten his sled to mine, the fellow behind him to his, and so on. We'll give the danger-signal as we go down, so that the skaters can skip out of the way. What do you say?"

"Yes! yes!" they all shouted. "There's no one like Clyde for getting up something new in the way of fun." And, with the greatest alacrity, the little monkeys arranged themselves in order, one behind the other.

Clyde was a general favorite at school. He had a generous, lovable disposition, a buoyant, lively way with him, and a fertile brain, full of suggestions amusing and helpful, that carried the day with the majority of the pupils in his room, and made him an acknowledged leader. In suggesting this last piece of fun, he did not



think that it was dangerous; that a wreck was almost certain to occur, and—but who ever saw boys who did not invent dangerous plays, and enjoy them so much the more because they were dangerous?

This afternoon there was intense excitement among the skaters, shouts of victory rising at each daring attempt to skim over the dangerous places; for the ice was cracking beneath their united weight, and in several places the water had risen through the fissures, and was running over it; while further down, nearer the dam, it had broken into huge cakes, and was actually afloat here and there. The shouts grew louder as two of the champion skaters challenged each other to a race. On they came, the coasters' danger-signal unheeded, and the guards at the crossing, which was hidden by a bend in the river, forgetting their duty in the excitement of the race. Down came the coasters in a long line, and across the ice at the identical moment when the skaters came speeding around the bend. Dash! crash! they came together; the long line scattered its freight over the ice, with a long list of bumps, and the ice itself responded by an ominous crash like the report of fire-arms, followed by the sudden rippling of water. In an instant the boys, large and small, were in the water, floundering about and screaming lustily for help. Fortunately, most of them were near the shore, and soon scrambled on the thick blocks of ice, and so to land; but when they came to look about them and count their number, they found that one was missing. It was Clyde.



They looked over the blocks of ice-cakes which were afloat upon the turbid water, and caught a glimpse of the little fellow floating toward the dam, clinging desperately to a piece of ice, while he tried to keep out of the way of the ice-cakes which were piling up on top of each other, or sailing out into the rapid current which would finally sweep everything, in a seething, boiling mass, over the dam, the roar of whose falling waters could be heard not far in the distance.

For just one instant the boys looked on in dumb terror; then they began to groan and cry and to run hither and thither, helplessly; but suddenly out from the horrified crowd swept a form with the strength of a lion and the speed of the wind. It was Ward. Flying from block to block of the glittering crystal, he sped onward toward his little step-brother, shouting, with a sound of tenderness in his voice: "Hold on like a man, Clyde! I'll reach you in time!"

Once, twice, thrice he leaped over a yawning abyss of waters, while the boys on the bank cheered him madly. Then he slipped, almost fell, righted himself, and swept on, shouting to the child who still clung to the little island of ice. He neared him, knelt down and reached out his hand, but the cake, rocked by the motion of the water, swept out of his reach and slowly around in the current. In a little while, such a few moments, the boy would be carried over the dam. Groans and cries again rent the air, but Ward did not hesitate. Hastily pulling off coat and boots he flung himself into the deep water among the floating ice and swam



to the aid of his brother. Only just in time; the little fellow's strength had given way, and just as Ward laid hold of him, his feeble grasp let go of his icy support. How Ward ever reached the shore in safety he never knew. He had some dim remembrance of getting Clyde upon another cake of ice; of pushing that cake over to another; of climbing upon that; of carrying the boy from cake to cake, wrapped in the coat he had pulled off; of being met half way by some of the other boys, and of finally reaching the shore with his burden. Once there, he laid the boy in one of the young men's arms, and shaking himself free from the crowd, disappeared over the hill and was lost to view; seemingly perfectly deaf to the sensation he had caused.

When he got home and slipped off upstairs to change his wet clothing, they had already arrived with Clyde in a carriage, and had him safely between the blankets. Some one had gone for a doctor, and he was there, looking into the case and shaking his head gravely over what might have been, and listening with admiration to the excited accounts of one and another of Ward's heroism.

"Little fellows are always getting into mischief," said he, pouring out a dose of something and putting it into Clyde's mouth. "Swallow that to keep you from getting cold. I bet you won't more than get over this before you'll be hatching up something else. That's the way with boys. I was one myself once, believe it? That brother of yours is a plucky fellow. I'd like to see him. If you had gone over that



dam it would have been all day with you. Where is Ward? I should think he would want some blankets and hot medicine as well as you."

At this, a good half-dozen of the helpers in the house made a rush upstairs and tried to persuade Ward that he needed a great deal of petting and nursing and whatnot, but he answered through the closed door that he needed nothing; that he had changed his clothes and was perfectly comfortable in every respect, and that he had no intention of being carried around on their hands, not the least in the world.

But when Mrs. Belmont, the moment she could leave Clyde, stole softly up the stairs to his room with her heart full to overflowing with thankfulness, and asked to come in, he came to the door at once and opened it; and when, as well as she could for the glad tears that were in her voice, she tried to thank him for the blessed service he had rendered her, and begged him to go to bed and let the doctor prescribe for him, he only said, brusquely: "You needn't thank me at all. I couldn't have done less and been human. If you can think of it as anything of a return for the favor which you did me the other day, all right. I am glad it came in my way to do something to show you that I realized and appreciated your kindness. No," a little impatiently, as though he was weary of the subject, "I am not going to be dosed. Tell the doctor to go to grass with his hot stuff. And you may make those fellows understand down there that I am not



going to be made a hero of. I shan't go downstairs until they leave the house."

With which words he stood civilly until she had left the room, then closed the door and locked it, leaving her in the hall with a tender smile upon her lips and the happy tears in her eyes.



## CHAPTER XIX.

### *A STEP FORWARD.*

MEANWHILE, Kate was busy with her books. She had applied for the school at Clinton and obtained it, having gone to Ludlow, the county-seat, and obtained a certificate, and she was diligently studying while awaiting the opening of the term. She fretted with feverish longing to be free from her father and Harold, both of whom persisted in sending her money and coming to see her at regular intervals. "If I can just get and keep this school," she would say, again and again to herself, "I can get along without their help and be independent. I hate to have them spying around and holding authority over me. I am old enough to be my own mistress, and I will not put up with it any longer than I can help. Father and Harry are all very well, of course, but they have an idea that women can't take care of themselves, and I should like to show them a thing or two."

She had gone to her Aunt Martha's and stayed some time, after the dread disease which had made havoc of their home had done its worst by destroying the joyous lives of the two little children; but the dark pall of grief which rested upon her uncle and aunt was so oppressive to her spirits that she was heartily glad to be recalled to Mrs. Knox's. She had become quite domesticated there, now. There was so



much hearty hospitality about the little woman, so much kindly sympathy, that, little by little, Kate had been drawn to open her heart to her, until the good woman understood her position fully. Without in the least reproaching her, she had kindly tried to open her eyes to the good which she had not a doubt existed in her step-mother and her family. "Folks are so dissimilar," she would say, "yet I suppose we are all made to fill our own little corner in the world, don't you? These things seem sad, to be sure, but you had done your share, no doubt, and the Father brought some one else along to take up the work and set you free. Something good comes of all these things. For instance, you wouldn't be here with us if it hadn't happened so, and we enjoy having you so much. You know John and I never had a child of our own, and it seems nice to adopt one for a while and play papa and mamma."

Mrs. Knox spoke the truth. Her heart yearned over Kate, the more that she found upon closer acquaintance that the girl needed the counsel and leadership of an older and wiser woman. So she had said: "You must just stay here with me. You may go and see Aunt Martha as often as you like, but I shan't let her have you. I consider my claim almost as good as hers." And so Kate had stayed with the one *proviso*, that Mrs. Knox should accept a certain sum of money every month for her board; and she learned to love Clinton very much. The woods and hills around it were romantically beautiful, and Kate loved to sit in the rustic chair on the back porch on sunny days and watch



them, while she caught a breath of approaching spring. And, yes, there was another reason why Kate liked Mrs. Knox's pretty home. Mr. Percival was supplying the church in Clinton, and came to the house a great deal. Indeed, there was not a time that he did not call either in going or coming, and although Kate would not have owned it to her heart, she learned very soon to watch for his coming and regret his going away. Not that he attached himself to her at all. On the contrary, he paid her no marked attention, but he brightened life for her, and she felt strengthened and helped by his presence. He never had reverted to the trouble in her family, and her abrupt departure; but though she did not request it, he brought her bits of news concerning her home and those she had left behind; spoke of the children and their tender remembrances of her, and in many trifling, undemonstrative ways strove to keep alive within her heart the flame of domestic affection; and poor Kate drank it in as the thirsty ground drinks in the rain. Hard as she had made herself, icily indifferent as she constrained herself to be, she could not destroy the germs of love within her uncultivated heart. They attained some degree of growth in spite of all, and bloom they did, a sickly flower enough, it is true, but still an evidence of life.

As time went on, Kate felt the difference more and more between her own Christian life and that of her hostess and Mr. Percival. To them God seemed so real, and heaven anything but a dream. It was, on the contrary, a real home, toward which they were looking with



longing eyes, and to which they expected to go so soon as their schooldays here were over. That was the way they put it. This world was a great school; here they were being educated for a higher life, which was to be the commencement of a beautiful forever. Kate had never before heard any one talk in just that way. Her father lived a very blameless life, Harold a most upright one, but she had never heard them talk much at home about divine things. She had been tolerably well contented with herself until now. She had been *her* kind of a Christian, and she had never stopped to inquire whether her kind was the Bible kind or not. But now grave questions began to arise within her heart, and she found herself consulting the Scriptures to see whether such and such things were so, which she had heard Mr. Percival and Mrs. Knox talking about. One evening she was deeply interested in hearing them converse of the influence, conscious and unconscious, of a life "hid with Christ in God."

Mrs. Knox said: "Arthur, so many times I have tried to touch other lives with the fire of my own thought about Jesus and his love for the lost, and, as far as I could see, I never kindled the tiniest flame; and yet I believe the Bible with all my heart, and it says that our 'labor is not in vain in the Lord,' and 'He that goeth forth weeping, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.' How do you fix that? I know that I have sown with weeping many a time, and have never seen a sign of the seed breaking ground."



Mr. Percival looked at the earnest little lady opposite him engaged in making a child's dress for an overworked neighbor, who, like the old woman of fairy lore, "had so many children she didn't know what to do," and he smiled—one of those rare, radiant smiles which actually illumine the face.

"Oh! my blessed woman," he replied, "you don't expect to gather in your harvest here, do you? So much is reserved for the life on the other side of the river! We may never know that we have made a single impression here, softened a single hard heart, awakened a single echo in a soul; but it is my opinion that we never sing a song, or shed a tear, or speak a word, for Christ, but blossoms into some flower of excellence and beauty in the golden land of the hereafter. I do not know what I would do if I did not believe this, so hopeless and fruitless does my work seem for much of the time; so often I cannot see that I have touched a single heart; everybody seems perfectly indifferent to the truth that I try to teach, and even to all personal efforts; and my very soul sinks within me. But I know what Jesus is. He is not going to let my love for him fall to the ground. It will be like the old lady's patchwork. In her dream, every block became a precious stone which reflected the rays of light in all the colors of the rainbow; and that is what I am looking for when I get home to heaven. I have been but a bungler here; my work is but patchwork; but Jesus will take it and make something everlastingly beautiful of it."



Kate sat and listened with a wondering, throbbing heart. Could this be true? If so, her stepmother's efforts for her would live forever, and result in glory by-and-by. A whole multitude of little things which had been done for her by her father's second wife crowded before her and peered at her from the galleries of her mind, where they had been thrust as far from the realm of thought as possible. How she hated the memory of them! The cheery, helpful words dropped by her; the uplifting songs that she sung while at her work; above all, the prayer that she had made in Kate's behalf—all came back, together with many other things which Kate would fain have forgotten. She knew that they were done for Christ; then, they would live in the great beyond, and she—perhaps she might have to owe her salvation to them.

She came back from her reverie in time to hear Mr. Percival say: "I came across something the other day on this subject that accorded with my feelings exactly. It was so sweetly and beautifully expressed that I would like to read it to you, if you don't object."

Taking a bit of newspaper from his vest-pocket, he read:

"Only a thought; but the work it wrought  
Could never by tongue or pen be taught;  
For it ran through a life like a thread of gold,  
And the life bore fruit an hundred-fold.

"Only a word; but 'twas spoken in love,  
With a whispered prayer to the God above;  
And the angels in heaven rejoiced once more,  
For a new-born soul entered in by the door."



"Don't you agree with me, Miss Katie, that that is not only good poetry, but the sweetest encouragement to us poor wayfarers upon the road of life?"

Kate bowed. She could not trust herself to speak, a strange thing for her. Her soul was more than usually aroused. The solemn question faced her, "What have I done that will live in God's eternity as good, and beautiful, and true?" and she made a half-formed resolution that she would, in beginning her school, try to do something to redeem the past, something to serve as a covering to the hateful life she had lived, whose works she feared would prove but hay and stubble in the day of trial, and be burned in a moment of time.

If only she had been willing to accept the divine help offered; but in her loneliness she still persisted, meaning to be sufficient for herself; and so was in no position to receive a blessing.

And so the time sped away, and the season for opening the spring term of school approached. The evening before her duties were to begin, Mrs. Knox came to her with a request. "My dear," said she, "I want to bespeak your kindest attention for two little German boys who will be among your scholars. They live down by the mill, and are so slow that no teacher has had the least patience with them. They have no chance to learn anything. I do want you to do your best for them, and I believe you will."

"I will certainly try, Mrs. Knox," said Kate, and she really meant every word she said.



“And poor Sadie Sloan; you remember the girl that rose for prayers one night at prayer-meeting. I do hope you will be able to influence her. She is a good, brave girl, but she has never come out in the light, and she is so ignorant. Poor Sadie. Let some beam from the divine Lamp fall on her, if you can, Katie.”

“If I can, dear Mrs. Knox,” but it is not necessary to state that she doubted her ability, and wished that Sadie Sloan was not to be among her pupils.



## CHAPTER XX.

### *KATE MAKES A BEGINNING.*

KATE'S school began the first of April, and lasted through the month of June.

Miss Richie had the primary room and all the pupils under twelve years of age. The school-building was a shabby affair, long and low, and with one vacant room, in which the children were allowed to play on rainy days. Kate's room was much superior to Miss Richie's, having been recently fitted up with new desks and stove, several large outline maps, and a nice arm-chair for the teacher, while in the primary department the stove was old and rusty, the benches mean, and the teacher's chair was disgraced by a broken back. Miss Richie did not mind these things, however; she had taught the little ones for more than three years, and felt altogether at home behind her homely little desk. She was standing smiling in the doorway as Kate came up, patting the curly heads of two little fellows who were hanging to her white apron and looking up at her with loving eyes.

"Good morning," said she, with a brightness that was infectious. "Isn't it a beautiful morning? So pleasant that we scarcely need a fire, though the babies and I thought we had best have a little bit, in case there might be dampness about. We kindled a wee bit in your room, too. I think you have a nice room, and



I hope you will like it and stay with me a good while. You will find your pupils very interesting. I am sure you will love them. You will probably have as many as forty in your room. I have twenty-seven, more than half of them little tots like these."

"Oh! I am positive that I shall like it," replied Kate, hanging up her hat and brushing her dress. "It is exactly what I have always wanted to do. My mother was a teacher at one time."

"Then it is your birthright, isn't it?" said Miss Richie, smiling pleasantly, as she busied herself in pulling down the windows at the top, so that there might be plenty of ventilation. "That will make everything much easier for you. I think nature is the best ladder in life to climb on. Do you tell me that this is your first attempt—that you have never taught before?"

"This is my first term," returned Kate.

"And you are a stranger to the pupils here?"

"I know a few of them," said Kate, hesitatingly. "I have been in Clinton, as you know, long enough to make several acquaintances. I know Dr. Joy's two girls, and Charley Edison, and the little lame girl who lives in that fine house with the long grassy yard so full of flowers. I forget the name."

"Mrs. Carrolton. You mean poor little Blanche. She is a sweet child, and very intelligent. You will have no difficulty in loving her."

"How are you in the habit of opening your



school?" asked Kate. "I have no ideas of my own about it especially, and I should like to know how you do. I have thought several times of asking you, and it has slipped my mind."

Miss Richie looked at her with a sweet seriousness.

"In my room," she said, "we always have a responsive Scripture reading the first thing. I read a verse, and then the pupils read in concert. Of course there are some of the little ones who cannot read, and I always try to select a verse or two from the central thought of the lesson for them to learn and recite. Then I go to the Saviour with a few words of prayer, and at the end they all join with me in repeating the Lord's Prayer. I am so glad that you have spoken to me about this, Miss Belmont. I want to enlist your Christian influence in behalf of not only your own room, but the whole school. There has been too little of the language of heaven taught here. So many of the teachers have been merely worldly, and have omitted prayer regularly, and often the Bible reading also. It has been a source of great anxiety to me; but, knowing your father to be a minister and you to be of the royal family of Jesus, I shall expect great things of our concerted efforts."

A dark red flush crept over Kate's face and suffused her neck. She had never thought of such a thing as this. She had never in all her life prayed in public. She felt that she could not do it. It was simply impossible; and yet she knew not what to say. Miss Richie stood



smilingly by, as if she thought it the most natural thing in the world to do, and Kate did not know how to tell her that she had come wholly unprepared to meet this emergency; she had not even brought a Bible with her.

As if in answer to this last thought, Miss Richie approached a little cupboard in the wall, saying: "The school-board has provided Testaments for each room. They are kept in here. Each child is expected to have one, and after morning worship we have some of the boys and girls collect them and put them back in the cupboard. In this way they are preserved and kept neat. Then, Miss Belmont, we all love to sing. Of course, at worship we always sing the Sunday-school songs; but at other times the children enjoy a change, and we generally allow them to take turns in choosing their favorites from our slender stock of songs. I am so glad that you have such a good voice; you can do so much good with it. Time to ring the bell, Willie?" as a small boy plucked her by the sleeve and pointed to the small, round clock in the corner. "Why, so it is. I guess that you and Eddie can ring it this time. Now I must go to my own room and marshal my little folks into their right places." And, with good wishes, the lady withdrew.

With the ringing of the bell came Mr. Percival with his Bible under his arm, smiling mischievously at Kate's evident astonishment, as he stood in the door with uncovered head.

"Will you let me come in?" he asked, coaxingly. "I'll be a real good boy, and I want to



learn a new something before I go home. Do forgive me!" as he noticed her distressed face. "I fear I am guilty of a great rudeness, but I had to go past your very door on my way to the depot, and I couldn't resist the temptation to step in and see you make a beginning. Is it mean? I didn't intend it, honestly. I am so pleased over your trying to do this. I believe it is a good thing, and I feel sure the Master is having a hand in it. *May I come in?*" as he saw the distressed look give way to a relieved one.

"You may upon one condition," said Kate, for when her eyes had fallen on the Bible a thought had come to her. "If you will open the school for me. I find Miss Richie reads the Bible and makes a prayer before her pupils, and she expects me to follow suit. You know well enough that I can't do that. I might read a few verses and say the Lord's Prayer with them, but that would be the extent. But, of course, as you are a minister, it would be very nice. Will you do it?"

"Do it? I shall be glad to, of course. You say you are to have responsive readings, Miss Katie? That will be nice. You will get used to this in a very short time, and I am glad the Father has called you where you may find it necessary to exercise your gifts. Make up your mind to be willing in the day of his power."

She had no time to respond, for the pupils were, by this time, streaming in at the open door, and with some confusion and a good deal of noise were making choice of their seats. Mr.



Percival and Kate both watched them keenly. For the most part they were a wide-awake, nice-looking set of young people, ranging from thirteen to eighteen years of age; and in dress and manners they did credit to their parents and the community. Of course there were some ill-looking ones; there always are in every assembly; but, for the most part, the two critics were well pleased with them. As soon as they became quiet, Kate introduced herself in a few well-chosen words, and also presented Mr. Percival, telling them that he would open the school with Bible-reading and prayer, and she hoped they would respectfully attend.

Some of the scholars already knew him, and took the liberty of nudging their neighbors and volunteering the information that they had heard him preach, while the Testaments were being passed; but when he arose, open Bible in hand, and turned his pleasant eyes upon them, they turned to him at once with profound attention.

"I am glad to meet you this morning, my dear young people," said he, with that rare, winning smile of his. "God has given me the gracious opportunity of saying a few words for Jesus to a roomfull of girls and boys. You know we always like to recommend our friends. Of course you do. Now, the best friend I have in all the world is Jesus Christ; he is the one who has taught me how to live, and he is the one who is going to teach me how to die. Now, you girls and boys are growing very rapidly into men and women, and what I want to say is just this: I hope that you will not only be



men and women, but cultivated Christian men and women; and that you will not only accept Miss Belmont as your teacher, but the Lord Jesus Christ himself. We all need educating, not only for this world, but for the world to come. We need to have our wild growth cultivated, trained in the right direction and made a fruit-bearer. None of you care for an apple tree which bears no apples, nor a grape-vine which bears no grapes. Neither do you like the sour crabs or the wild grapes as you do our beautiful, cultivated fruit, the Rambos, Pippins, and Baldwins; the Concords, Delawares, and Malagas. Under God, man has made of this sin-cursed earth a beautiful and productive soil, and that is just what you can do with the help of the great Teacher, Jesus Christ, for your minds and hearts. You can make of them the most beautiful gardens in which will grow the flowers of poesy and the fruits of wisdom. 'Knowledge is power.' You can make yourselves desired by the world by becoming well-educated. The world will not accept ignorant servants. If you want to be anybody you must *know*. A boy who learns book-keeping has a chance to become a banker; a girl who understands composition has a chance to become an author; one who masters elocution has the liberty of the platform, and so on. Just think of it! Make up your minds to begin this term of school with Jesus as your educator as well as Miss Belmont, and I can assure you the world will be a better world for your having lived in it. Now, if you will open your Testaments to the eleventh chapter of Matthew, I



will begin at the twenty-fifth verse, and we will, alternately reading, finish the chapter. Then we will ask our Father in heaven to give you all inquiring minds as regards not only earthly wisdom but that wisdom which is from above."

After the reading and prayer, they sang a hymn, and Mr. Percival bade them a graceful adieu and bowed himself out, much to their regret.

Well, that was over, and well over, too; and Kate breathed a sigh of relief as she turned to her roll-book and began to record the names. The morning was passed in examining the intellectual status of the pupils and in arranging them into classes. In the afternoon the lessons were begun, and, as they applied themselves to their books, Kate took a quiet and studied observation of her school. There were several faces which interested her very much. She liked Charley Edison. He smiled whenever he caught her eye, and was bright, sociable, and handsome. Then there were Dr. Joy's two girls, almost young ladies, so stylishly dressed for a place like Clinton, so handsome and intelligent, that she felt sure they would be companionable. Little lame Blanche Carrolton was very sweet—such a dainty little creature, and dressed with so much care. She would like to become better acquainted with Blanche's mother; she must be a lovely lady. Then there were the Millers, and the Townsend boy, and that mischievous Murray Sullivan. She would get up a nice little society of some kind with these young people; and at the thought of resuming her old life of leadership, her spirits



rose involuntarily. But what should she ever do with that great, awkward-looking girl in the ill-made, faded, calico dress, so long at both sides and so ridiculously short before and behind, who talked loud and wore her hair short—Sadie Sloan? Sadie and the two little German boys of whom Mrs. Knox had spoken were pupils that Kate would most gladly have dispensed with. The small Germans were fully as unpromising as they had been represented to be. They were bare-footed, though so early in the season, and their round, fat bodies were clad in clothes which seemed bursting at every seam. Their small, blue eyes were stupid and expressionless, and Kate wished with all her heart that they were not enrolled upon her book. However, she had promised Mrs. Knox to take especial pains with them; and, aside from that, she recognized that, as a teacher, she belonged to them quite as much as to anybody in the room. So she went down the aisle and seated herself by their side.

"What did you say, your names are?" she asked.

"Swope," was the response, "Fritz and Hans."

"And which is Fritz and which is Hans?" asked Kate. "I am afraid that I am not going to be able to tell you apart."

"Dis von ish Fritz, myself ish Hans," replied one, with a laugh all over his face.

"You have been to school a good deal," said Kate; "you ought to have learned a great deal."

"Fritz ish von pig fool," said Hans, shaking his head.



“Hans ish anodder,” said Fritz.

At this they both laughed good-humoredly.

“You must make up your mind to conquer your lessons,” said Kate. “You have been letting them get the better of you. You remember the motto that the gentleman spoke of this morning—‘Knowledge is power’? I think that I shall embroider that motto very handsomely, and have it framed and hung up right opposite you, for the scholar who tries to learn most.”

The boys’ dull eyes sparkled.

“Now,” said Kate, “I see that you read very poorly, and your progress in arithmetic has been exceedingly slow. But I’ll tell you what I will do. If you’ll come to Mrs. Knox’s twice a week, after school, I will give you some private instruction. I am very anxious that you should get on.”

The boys were voluble in their thanks; and Kate felt that “if those horrid little German boys don’t learn, it will be their own fault.”

The next morning she was much astonished and taken aback at being presented with a very large cookie, as big as a saucer, by the two broad-faced little German brothers.



## CHAPTER XXI.

### *WARD'S PRESCRIPTION.*

THE days and weeks rolled by, and though Ward was, in many respects, a changed boy, he walked the streets far too much for a boy who had a high standing to make in order to enter the senior class in the high school the next year. True, he spent no more evenings at the "Monkey Ranch," for since the police had broken up the boys' gambling-nest, he as well as some of the others had fought shy of this death-trap; but he found it quite impossible to get rid of Jud. The persistent fellow met him everywhere, and it became next to impossible to refuse his pressing invitations to slip off into his room at home and play cards "just for fun"; and, once there, it was so easy to forget his promise to his stepmother, and to stake small sums of money on the game, and to win a dollar by laying down a nickel.

The great trouble with Ward was, that he had not yielded to Christ, but had hardened his heart, and had allowed Jesus of Nazareth to "pass by" without calling on him for salvation. Mrs. Belmont had hoped and prayed that he would yield to Christ without delay. She knew that both mind and heart had been aroused upon the subject; that he had felt the need of something better in his life; but if he had ever had these thoughts, he had evidently resisted them, or put them off until "a more convenient season."



In fact, Ward was trying to be his own physician. He was trying to heal his own sin-sick soul. He certainly realized that he was not right; that something was disturbing his soul-life; that, in fact, he had gone morally wrong. He meant—honestly enough, too—to remedy all this; and he believed—poor, self-deceived boy!—that he was sufficient for himself. He really thought that he could be as good a young man without Christ as Harold was with Christ. Still, he found himself doing things which he knew that Harold would not have done, and that he would have scorned Harold for doing. He knew that the card-playing in Jud's room was not right nor innocent; the broken promises to his stepmother haunted him; and his constant cigarette-smoking was bringing on a kind of heart-trouble. A physician had kindly volunteered him that information; but he still smoked on, regardless of the poison which he was inhaling into his nervous system.

One evening during the summer vacation he came home from the post-office, where he had been to mail some letters, and found there an old acquaintance of his father's. They were having a grand time renewing an old and established friendship; and Dr. Belmont immediately called to the boy as he entered the room, and, throwing one arm lightly across his shoulder, said: "Randall, this is my second boy, Ward. He will be seventeen years of age next month. He expects to graduate from the high school next year. I want to make a lawyer of him. Mr. Randall, of Pasadena, California, Ward. We were schoolboys together."



The stranger grasped Ward's hand and shook it heartily.

"So you are destined for the bar, are you?" said Mr. Randall. "You'd better go home with me, and become a fruit-merchant. I have a big orange grove, a vineyard, and a packing-house, and you can make big money—make a fortune by the time you are thirty years of age. Come, now, what do you say to going back with me? As far as high-school is concerned, that's nothing. There are high schools and high teachers out there—plenty of them. What do you say, Belmont? I'll pay his way, and keep him 'as snug as a bug in a rug' in my own home. I've got a mighty pretty little girl, but never a boy; and here you are with three right in a row. It isn't fair."

Ward caught his breath as the stranger went on, rapidly and forcibly, speaking to his father, and urging his claims in an earnest, sincere, and friendly manner; and a great desire arose in the boy's heart to accept Mr. Randall's offer, and to get away from Oakland and its constant temptations.

"I can begin all over again if I can go to some place where I am not known," he mused, "but I can never be good for anything here. I can't throw off Jud; it is impossible; and his influence kills me. I stumble over him all the time. If I once get away, I will be careful what kind of acquaintances I make."

He was recalled from his mental wandering by his father saying: "I don't want to see my boys go out from under the old roof-tree while they are so young, Randall. It will be hard



enough to part with them when they get to be men. I speak from experience. I left my home too soon for my own good, and my father's also. I ought not to have done it. I would have escaped so much, my father would have gained so much, if I had remained with him until I was at least twenty-one years old. I would have attained a stronger mental as well as physical growth if I had allowed my father to take care of me a little longer."

But Mr. Randall, for some reason, was determined to carry his point; and Ward sided with him so earnestly that the good Doctor was constrained to promise that he would think about it. Further than that he could not be urged to go; and Ward retired to his room with the question undecided, and full of such excitement that he could not rest. To make it worse, when Harold came up to bed, he had heard of the project, and was full of indignant remonstrance.

"Ridiculous!" he exclaimed, in very great heat for him; "the idea of a boy of your age going so far away from home! Such a thing would be bad enough in me, and I am nearly twenty-one years old. I should think, Ward, that your heart would not let you do it; I should think that you would think too much of us to place such a distance between us. If it were a hundred miles or so, I would not open my mouth on the subject; but California! The thought is absurd; and I don't see what that man Randall is thinking of to suggest such a thing. Nothing but absolute necessity would drive me to do it."



Ward broke into a little sarcastic laugh.

"I am such an object of affection in this household," he said; "my society is so highly prized; I am missed so sorely the moment I step out from the family circle, that my heart quite melts within me, and I find that I am a beast to think of going off to seek my fortune; nevertheless, I feel constrained so to do. Jokes all aside, Hal, and speaking seriously, a chance like this doesn't come to a fellow like me more than once in a lifetime. I'd be a fool not to take advantage of it, and father is another if he doesn't allow me to do it. No, sir! I'd leave this town behind me too quickly, and go where it is possible to be somebody, if I could. There's nothing here for a fellow to do. I do wish that I was a man; it wouldn't take me long to decide my future."

Harold sat down on the bed by the side of his younger brother, and laid his hand affectionately upon the one buried in the nut-brown hair.

"My dear Ward," said he, "you do not need to be a man yet. You are just educating with the man in view. Be content to remain at home and be the studious boy, and make somebody of yourself in time, instead of going off to try being somebody at once. You would better let father decide for you in this. He has a man's wisdom, gathered from years of experience; you may rest assured that he knows best."

Ward sprang up excitedly.

"The world is not what it was when he was a boy," he said, with almost savage earnestness. "It's on the move, and we have got to



move with it, or be left behind. Boys are not what they used to be, either; they didn't know nearly so much then, and a little satisfied them. But it isn't that way now, I tell you. There are mighty few boys of my age who remain under their father's roof unless they have work handy. Every boy is expected to earn his own living when he gets to be about as old as I am, and I don't want to be the exception. There is literally nothing to do here; I told you that before."

"By the time you have gained your education there will, doubtless, be an opening. There was one for me; why not for you?"

"You and I are two very different individuals, Hal," said the boy, with a frown. "A slow old place like yours would never suit me at all. I've got my head set on making money. I intend to be rich. What is the use of being contented with a thousand dollars when you can have fifty thousand? That's the way I look at it, and that's right. I tell you, Harold, you've got your eyes shut; you don't see ahead. Such an offer as this of Mr. Randall's is an unheard-of thing, and it is full of just splendid possibilities. It's the meanest kind of a shame to miss it, and I'll never forgive father if he makes me do it. Good-night; I'm going to sleep."

And with that, Ward turned his back on his brother, pulled the bed-clothes over his head, and refused to say another word.

The next day the subject was renewed. Ward argued the question with singular ability upon every side, the financial one especially.

"You know," he said to his father, leaning



back in his chair with his legs crossed and his hands thrust deep in his pockets, and speaking in his deliberate, forceful way, "you know that this town is not a financial centre. There are moneyed men here, to be sure; but they did not grow up here—this town did not make them. There's nothing here to build fortunes out of. It's a college town, and a very small one at that. There's nothing but scholarship to be had, from the beginning to the end of the chapter, and everything tends to professional life; and as far as I am concerned, I hate professional life. You talk about my being a lawyer. Why, there are enough lawyers here now to keep all Oakland in court the whole time. I want to make money; that's what I am after; and I don't want to drudge through my whole life to get enough to give myself a respectable burial, either."

"There is too much of this money-making disposition among young people just now," said Dr. Belmont, thoughtfully. "I don't like it; it doesn't have the right ring. Instead of making good manhood and womanhood—instead of building character—the girls as well as the boys are all for making money and building fortunes. I haven't much faith in the outcome of such ambition, myself; it is not scriptural; and, Ward, papa is anxious for you to be an educated man. You have abilities which ought to be consecrated to your Father in heaven."

The sullen look deepened on Ward's face; his dusky eyes looked dangerous; his resolute lips were compressed determinedly. He swayed back and forth in his chair for a few minutes



in silence. At last he said, with more of the old grimness than he had shown for some time: "I'll never be anything creditable to you as long as I stay in this town. It's worse than poison to one of my disposition. Good, paying work, such as Mr. Randall offers, will cure me of my nonsense quicker than anything. It kills me to lie around; and——pshaw! father, what is the use of more education? I've got all that I need for a business life, and that's just what I intend to be—a business man. What is the good of the last year of the high school to me? Not *that!*" and he snapped his fingers derisively. "There's not a bit of use in forcing a boy to be something that he hasn't a particle of taste for. A fellow who is treated in that way never does amount to a row of pins; and I shan't, I know. Besides, I want to see something of the world, and here is a number one chance; and it won't cost you one cent."

"Perhaps not," returned his father; "but that argument has very little influence with me, Ward. My objection is not so much Mr. Randall or his offer as it is your youth. You are but a boy yet, my son, and home is the best place for you, for years to come."

Ward rose from his chair, shoved it noisily out of the way, and opened the door as if to go out. Then he hesitated, turned round, and said: "You had better consent to my leaving you with your full and free approbation rather than without it. The time may come when I may take a notion to step out without it, of my own accord. I wish"—turning to Mrs. Bel-



mont, who was present—"that *you* would use your influence on my side of the question."

Then he went out.

Dr. Belmont turned abruptly to his wife.

"You don't think, Lucia ——" he began.

She looked into his surprised eyes calmly and convincingly.

"I do," she said, simply, without pausing in her sewing; "I think you would better let him go, George."



## CHAPTER XXII.

### *THE GATHERING SHADOW.*

SO Mr. Randall took Ward away. He was to stay with him until he was twenty-one years old, and then, if dissatisfied, he could change his business, if so minded. Ward was in high spirits, and watched the arranging and packing of his effects with excellent grace and condescension.

"You needn't mind fixing up all manner of things," said he to his stepmother, as he saw her laying in a stock of new handkerchiefs and socks; "I'll soon fix up myself all right. It won't take me long to earn all the clothes that I want, and more, too."

"Nevertheless," she replied, "it will be nice to have these things in case of emergency. There is an old book which says, 'thou knowest not what shall be on the morrow.' I always think of that when I am going on a journey. I want to reserve a place for this however," producing a very handsome copy of the Holy Scriptures bound in Russia leather and printed on fine linen paper. "This is my parting gift to you, Ward. I wanted to give it to you, not only because I feel that it is the very best present that I can make you, and the most lasting token of my regard for you, but because I believe that your own dear mother would rather see you receive it, and would have given it to you herself had she been living on the earth to-day. Will you read it for her sake?"



Ward's eyes filled with tears, as they always did at mention of the mother he had so dearly loved and so greatly mourned; and, reaching out a trembling hand, he took the book, and opened it to the flyleaf. His name was written within in Mrs. Belmont's fair hand, and below it a verse from Frances Ridley Havergal's little book, *Loyal Responses*:

"Rest him, O loving Spirit! O holy Dove,  
Spread thy bright wing above him; let him rest  
Beneath its shadow; let him know afresh  
The infinite truth and might of thy dear name—  
'Our Comforter'! As gentlest touch will stay  
The strong vibrations of a jarring chord,  
So lay thy hand upon his heart, and still  
Each overstraining throb, each pulsing pain;  
Then, in the stillness, breathe upon the strings,  
And let thy holy music overflow  
With soothing power his listening, resting soul."

"Cannot you make me that promise, my dear boy?" asked his stepmother, as he turned away, after softly laying the beautiful gift among the other remembrances in his trunk. "Will you not read it, and let the Spirit rest you?"

"I'll think about it," he said, reluctantly. "I don't like to make promises of this kind."

"Why so, my dear?"

"Because they are considered binding, and I suppose they are binding; and I — how is a fellow to know whether he can keep them or not?" he asked abruptly, stopping before her and gazing reflectively into her eyes.

"There is everlasting strength in the great Redeemer of souls, my dear, if only you could learn to trust that strength. But I will change my request a little, and ask, Will you *try* to read this Bible, Ward?"



The boy nodded.

"Yes," said he, "I'll try it, if it will do you any good, and for *her* sake, if she hears me say it"; and he wiped away a tear that would come stealing down his face.

"And for your own soul's sake, my dear boy. We will pray the dear Saviour to help you to keep it—the most precious promise that you ever made in your life. Now, one word more. I have a very old and tried friend living in Pasadena. His name is Austin McVay, and he is a prominent lawyer there. I have written him a little note, which, if you should ever chance to see him, or to need a friend, will act as an introduction. I should be very glad for you to know him."

"All right," said Ward, evidently relieved that the interview was so nearly at an end; "tuck it in. I'll promise you to remember that; and——thank you for the book. You are very good."

So saying, he turned and left the room.

The next day Dr. Belmont, with tear-dimmed eyes and an aching, struggling heart, watched the train bear away this son of his. He felt an impression that it was letting him go forever; that he would never have him again; but he tried hard to realize that God had him in his care and keeping, and that, perhaps, this was one of the inscrutable ways in which a "frowning providence" hid the "smiling face." He went home, and applied himself more assiduously than ever to his church and his pastoral work. The church, too, was not in the prosperous condition that it had been in a year or



two before. Differences of opinion had arisen here and there over certain questions; some of the members had been delinquent in duty, and had to be brought up for examination; and there were hard feelings manifested, and ill-savored reports going about. Some said that the pastor was partial; that he visited some of the people of his congregation more than he did others, and that it was quite noticeable that he went to see those who had the money, and left the poor folks to get along as "sheep without a shepherd." Others complained that his wife was worldly, and indifferent to the interests of the church. Dr. Belmont was not a man to pay much attention to these things. He had always made it a point to close his ears to everything of a slanderous nature, unless it demanded the action of the church; but he had heard these reports, no doubt; and the knowledge that such a state of things existed wore upon him and affected his health. Though as kindly as ever, his old gaiety had left him, in a great degree, and threads of silver were thickening amid the raven locks of his abundant hair, and the lines of care deepened on his brow each day.

Besides these things, his labors were abundant and very heavy. His church was a large one, and, being a popular minister, he was frequently called upon to preside over important meetings which had no immediate connection with his own church, besides uniting with his brother ministers in supporting two mission churches in the city—one among the colored people in the south end, and one in the inter-



est of the railroad men over the river. All this necessitated a great deal of preaching, the holding of many extra meetings, and much burden-bearing that was done solely for the Master, without a single hope of pecuniary reward. These accumulated burdens served to weaken the physical strength of the pastor of Grace-street Church, and his wife watched him with anxious, troubled eyes, as every week he stooped a little more, and grew more care-worn and weary. Thus the summer dragged away, and the leaves began to fall in lavish abundance on the frost-bitten grass, and the wind grew noisy and blustering, and talked of an early winter and a severe one. An epidemic broke out in the city, followed by severe and protracted sickness and many deaths. A large number of Dr. Belmont's congregation were prostrated by it, and his pastoral work was almost doubled. He became so nervous from his overwork that he could not sleep, and many a night would find him up and dressed, unable to rest among his pillows.

Meanwhile, a letter or two had arrived from Ward—brief, boyish epistles, but, on the whole, encouraging. Several had been received from Mr. Randall, also, which, in the anxious father's estimation, were much more to the purpose, stating that "the boy is answering my expectations, and doing first-rate;" so that Dr. Belmont's apprehensions were greatly relieved.

Kate, too, was doing well. She was still teaching at Clinton. She had made a grand success of her first term, and had been engaged for the whole of the coming year. She seemed to have the faculty of making the children learn,



whether they wanted to do so or not; and the two little German boys, who had been such hopeless dunces in the estimation of every teacher before her, were, thanks to her painstaking efforts, really beginning to see into the mysteries of knowledge, and to unlock the doors leading into the secret chambers of learning.

With Sadie Sloan she was not so successful. In the first place, she had conceived a great dislike for this girl; and although she did her duty by her as regarded teaching the girl her lessons and seeing that she understood them thoroughly, she slighted her in every other respect; so that it was very generally understood by the other girls that Sadie was to be counted out of their good times, many of which Kate herself arranged for them. Sadie, however, never seemed to bear any malice, and even appeared to have an extraordinary regard for Kate. She was a curious girl, too. She would sit and gaze abstractedly at Kate while the other girls were gathered about her, never making a single remark upon the subject under discussion, and suddenly astonishing everybody by some question quite wide of the mark; as one day at recess: "Miss Belmont, why do you call that prayer you make every morning 'the Lord's Prayer'?"

"Because it is the Lord's, to be sure," said Kate, rather indignantly; for above all things she hated this girl's questions about religion, as generally having a rather close application. "He made it, of course."

"Did he?" asked Sadie, innocently. "I



thought it was yours. Can't a person have a prayer of their own?"

"Why, of course they can, if they want to," said Kate, irritably.

"I should think that you'd want to have one of your very own to say, like Miss Richie and Mr. Percival," persisted the girl, with a quiz-zical look. "If I knew how, I should make one for every morning of my life—a new one."

"You are perfectly welcome to do as you please about that," said Kate, promptly. "As for myself, I think that the Lord 'knew how to pray better than anybody else."

But Sadie was not to be put down.

"Miss Belmont," said she, "what is sanctification?"

Kate pushed her copy of Webster over to Sadie, with the remark, "Satisfy yourself!"

The girl took the book, and read aloud the definition, the other girls peeping interestedly over her shoulder: "Separated or set apart to a holy use."

Then Sadie inquired, solemnly: "Miss Belmont, are *you* sanctified?"

Kate's answer was so full of volume that no further interrogatories were put at that time, though many were crowding for utterance. It was short, but full of feeling: "No, I'm not."

In spite of these little annoyances, which stirred her up a good deal more than they ought to have done, Kate had certainly grown happier with her work. Harold was astonished at the change in her. She had learned to smile instead of frown, and the habitual self-control which she was obliged to manifest



in order to control her school improved her temper amazingly. Finding her so pleasant, Harold had come to see her, of late, more frequently, and in this way had become acquainted with Miss Richie, between whom and himself there had sprung up a special friendship. Through her he became better acquainted with Clinton's possibilities, and, with Mr. Percival's help, organized a Young Men's Christian Association in the place. Once in a while he found it possible to go up and stay over Sunday, and then a grand song-service was held, which ladies as well as gentlemen were expected to attend. In these exercises Kate found full scope for her voice, was duly admired, and enjoyed it immensely. To Miss Richie Harold confided his ambition to be a minister of the gospel, too—something which he had kept secret from everybody but his father."

One Sunday Harold and Kate were to sing together at the Young Men's Christian Association hall, and Harold was to bring with him a professor from the university to address the young men and help to create a deeper interest in the work; but Saturday evening arrived, and they did not come. More than usual preparations had been made, and Kate was much disappointed. She was getting ready for the meeting, when Mr. Knox came hurriedly in with a telegram. It ran thus:

*"To Miss Kate Belmont, Clinton:*

"Father was stricken with paralysis two hours ago. Insensible still. Three doctors in attendance. Will telegraph again later.

*"HAROLD BELMONT, Oakland."*



The particulars, as learned afterwards, were these: Dr. Belmont had been feeling hardly as well as usual for several days. A strange numbness stealing over him had been apparent at times, and the disinclination to sleep had grown more decided. It was on this account that Harold had thought it best to remain at home, for he was very much worried about his father. Still, the pastor had prepared his two sermons as usual, and had also arranged for a meeting in the "south end" that afternoon. A larger congregation than common greeted him, as one of the city pastors was absent, and one was unable to preach because of the epidemic; so that Dr. Belmont felt, perhaps, excited to a little extra effort. The choir had sung the opening anthem, a visiting minister made the invocation, and the pastor arose, read his text, and began his sermon. From the first, Mrs. Belmont, who sat in a front pew, noticed a strange tremulousness in his voice and manner. A few minutes more, and his face became pallid, his hands shook, and his usually clear, resounding voice sounded thick and unnatural. Soon the faltering tones sank to a whisper, and the next moment he stopped speaking altogether, and a look of horror spread over the congregation as they saw his lips move as if with a vain attempt to articulate the words. A stifling sound proceeded from his throat; he groaned aloud, raised his hands to his head, as if he suffered there, and fell forward upon the desk. On the instant a score of helpers rushed from the nearest point in the congregation and raised him in their arms. A physician in the



audience came forward and proffered his services, while half-a-dozen boys ran out to summon a carriage to convey the sufferer home. He was quite insensible. Friends and neighbors crowded into the house on Rose street to help, but found themselves able to do but little, while the wife, calm, and even tearless, skillfully arranged everything to help the physicians in their examination. Nellie sat down with her hat still on, with Brownie on her lap, and Mammie and Clyde wildly sobbing by her side, and wept softly, in her gentle, patient way; but not a tear rolled down the white face of Mrs. Belmont as she stood by the bedside of her husband awaiting the decision of the physicians. It did not come till late in the afternoon, and Harold brought it to her with a suffering face.

"Dr. Marsh says it is the opinion of all the doctors," said Harold, "that he may live, perhaps, for years, but that his work is over. His return to consciousness and speech is greatly in his favor. They think that they can free the brain, but the rest of the left side is the same as dead, and will probably never regain its sensation. But he will never again be able to do anything—never lift himself off his bed. Oh! mother, it is so terrible! What shall we do?"

"Be just as brave as we can," she said, with a struggling heart. "It is such a comfort to us that papa still lives, and that his reason is spared to him, and that there are so many of us to be hands and feet to him. Let us think of him, not of ourselves, and make every bit of sunshine for him that we can."



"How does Mrs. Belmont take it?" asked Mrs. Ransom and Miss Bush of Lucy. "Have you heard anything?"

"They say she acts dreadfully unfeeling," was the response; "nobody has seen her shed a tear."

"Humph!" said Mrs. Ransom, disgusted, "I do think that it is a judgment on her. She has brought nothing but ill-luck to that house from first to last. The children aren't the same little creatures. Kate's had to go, Ward was driven off, and now the Doctor's struck. The Lord isn't going to prosper that woman—mark my words."

"I hope that Kate won't come flying back and take all the burdens of that house on her shoulders," said Miss Bush. "I mean to 'put a flea in her ear.'"

"I think that she might at least feel badly," said Lucy, "but folks say that you wouldn't know that anything had happened."

Poor Mrs. Belmont! No one ever saw her alone with her God in her closet.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

### *RAINY DAYS.*

NOW that the pastor of the church of Oakland lay sick and helpless on his bed, his work all over, his duty done, there were plenty to sympathize, and many to offer help. If the kind words had only come a little sooner, if the help had but been rendered when his heart was breaking with the load which it carried, it might have saved him; but it was too late now. The trembling right hand would never write another sermon; the tremulous, hesitating voice would never deliver one. All day long, and day after day, he lay in the quiet, darkened room, unable to move without help, and speaking with difficulty. As there was the greatest necessity for keeping him free from all excitement, no one was allowed in his room except those in attendance. They had speedily fallen into line in regard to their various duties. Harold had installed a strong young woman in the kitchen, leaving Mrs. Belmont free to minister to her sick husband, relieved only by Harold himself during a part of the night; and Nellie, though so fragile, managed to take care of the three children, with what help the hired girl and her mother could give her. Constrained by the terrible thought that her father might pass away without ever seeing her again, and softened by the near approach of the "dark-winged angel," Kate re-



turned home for a few days. Once there, the joy of father and the children at again beholding her among them, and the unfeigned kindness and real, Christian affection of her stepmother, almost overwhelmed her; and Kate was, for the time being, quite gracious for her. But finding that her father was likely to linger, perhaps for months, perhaps for years; that, though the children seemed to love her, they were no longer hers in the sense in which she wished them to be hers, the old rebellion again arose within her, and she insisted upon returning to her school at once, a resolution in which she was supported by the Ransoms. She reasoned Kate-fashion when Harold expostulated with her.

"There is a great deal more sense in my taking care of myself now than ever there was before," she said. "Our father's salary has stopped, and how is this large family going to live on what you can make? I know pretty well how it is. The church was always ever so much behind on the salary; father has always been in the habit of cancelling these obligations very largely at the close of the financial year; and we lived about even up with his income when I was at home. How is it now, with three extra to feed, clothe, and educate? There is no use in talking. I can do nothing if I stay. Our stepmother would be jealous if I tried to take care of father; the children's minds have been poisoned in regard to me; and as to going back into that old kitchen again and being a drudge, I won't do it. I will pay the girl's wages. I can do that well enough.



But I have a good position—one that I have a prospect of keeping. I make thirty-five dollars a month there—five dollars more than I could make in any other common school that I know of; and I am not inclined to let such a chance slip through my fingers. Besides, if I stay at home, I'll fly all to pieces before long. You ought to know that time has not reconciled me to the changes here; so, if you want to avoid an explosion, you'll let me go." And go she did.

After all, there was much truth in what Kate said. Dr. Belmont's family had been an expensive one, and the end of the year generally found him more or less embarrassed. Things had not been so easy to manage since the children's mother died. She had been a very wise steward, and had handled the household money in a way all her own, the beneficent effects of which had been felt outside her own home and among the very poor. Since her death, expenses had seemed to double up, for Kate did not know how to economize, and the good pastor often felt the pitiful truth that he had not the wherewithal to bestow in common charity.

In a few weeks Harold began to understand more of his father's affairs than he had ever known before. Unpaid bills were brought to him, one after another, some of them a year or two old; and he soon came to the end of his father's bank account, and found that all in the world which they had to call their own was the house on Rose street. Even this was under a heavy mortgage, and would have been sold over their heads had not Mrs. Belmont, without one word to anybody, lifted the mortgage with the



remnant of her own little fortune. At the best, they were in very straitened circumstances. Harold's salary was a meagre one; many young men would have found it far too small to meet their individual wants; and the question of how the family were going to live, the little ones obtain their education, and the sick father be taken care of properly, came up all too soon to be answered. The winter promised to be a severe one. The mercury went down below zero before Christmas, and stayed there for days; and they were obliged, of course, to keep fires all night on account of the patient. Worse than all, the physician had told them that they would be obliged to hire a night nurse. Mrs. Belmont and Harold were already wearing out, and a strong man was needed to lift the patient and give him the care which he needed. Such a nurse would cost as much as ten dollars a week; and how they were going to command such a sum of money was more than Harold could conceive of. His distracted thoughts turned in every direction, only to return to him void. In his extremity, he called his stepmother into the study, and laid the case before her.

"It is just as Dr. Marsh says," he remarked, in conclusion. "There is no certainty how long this may last. Father may live for years in the same helpless condition in which he is at present, and you will wear out; indeed, you are very much worn already; and I cannot work during the day and take care of him at night. A night nurse does seem indispensable, and yet I do not see where the money to pay him is coming from."



Mrs. Belmont smiled—a little wearily, it may be, but hopefully and brightly, too, and said: “My dear Harry, we are ‘children of the King.’ ‘The world is his, and the fulness thereof.’ He has promised never to leave us nor forsake us. Shall we not trust him?”

“Yes, above all things else,” returned Harold, with emotion. “I would not have you worry for anything, mother. There will, doubtless, be some provision made to meet the case. But I thought that perhaps you might be able to make a suggestion—might point out some way in which I might earn the extra money. I have racked my poor brain, and can think of nothing.”

Mrs. Belmont seated herself in the large arm-chair, and leaned her head against it, wearily.

“I cannot see how you can do more, Harry, than you are doing already,” she said, at last, speaking very thoughtfully; “but I think that I can arrange to do something. If we are to have a night nurse, I shall be able to get my regular rest; and your father does not need a great deal of attendance during the day. He sleeps a good deal then, and makes very little trouble. The restless period is at night, and, as Dr. Marsh says, that is the time when he requires a skilled nurse. You must know,” she continued, smiling up at the young man beside her, “that I have a trade. I was a fashionable dressmaker for some years before I married your father. It is a lucrative business where it is carried on well. Of course, I could not hope to do as well as I used to do, but I could make more than enough to meet this trouble,”



Harold burst forth at once: "How in the world can you think of such a thing, mother? What would people say if I allowed it? The idea of your marrying my father and going to work at dressmaking to support him! You have already done too much. You have saved our home to us. Please do not mention it again. I will try to borrow the money in some way."

"I beg that you will do nothing of the kind," said Mrs. Belmont, firmly. "There is no dishonor in honest labor. Why should you mind such unkind things as a few people may have to say? Of course, when I married your father I did not expect to have to do this, but I am glad to be able to do it. I would much rather have the privilege of doing this than to be obliged to stand by and see another do it. I expected to be a helpmate, you know."

Harold looked at her wonderingly.

"Is this the way you take trouble?" he asked. "I wish that I could smile as you do over the inevitable. You almost look as if you rejoiced over your tribulations."

Mrs. Belmont shook her head.

"I do not desire affliction," said she; "that would be unnatural; and yet, if we believe and trust the wisdom and mercy of our Saviour, we ought to look at them as 'blessings in disguise.' As to caring for what people say, do you think it best to mind that? They will have their opinions; let them. I am not serving the world; so that I do my duty, I have no need to worry about what it says, either this or that."

Still Harry argued the case, and was only



half-satisfied at the conclusion that they reached after a long conference, namely, that Mrs. Belmont should go out that very afternoon and solicit patronage among her friends.

It was four o'clock, and Mrs. Wade, the wife of the St. Paul's Methodist minister, had just come home from a missionary meeting, full to the brim with the letters read from the home and foreign fields, and especially of something which had been said by the president, Mrs. Fairfax.

"Let us not forget," said she, "what some one has so beautifully called our 'wayside ministries.' There are opportunities coming to us every day of helping the unfortunate, rescuing the perishing, lifting up the fallen, and giving to the needy. Our Master said, 'The poor ye have with you always.' Let us remember that. Let us not forget and step over the little, common, every-day opportunities of doing good, which lie at our very feet, in our eagerness to reach out after the great and noble. 'He that is faithful in that which is least will be faithful also in much.'

" 'If you cannot give your thousands,  
You can give the widow's mite;  
And the least you do for Jesus  
Will be precious in his sight.' "

So full was Mrs. Wade's heart of this uplifting thought that she hardly waited to take off her wraps before getting the hymn-book and hunting up "Your Mission." Having found it, she sat down to the piano, and played and sang it with so much interest that she did not notice the servant usher in a lady until her name had



been twice pronounced. She turned then, and rose to meet Mrs. Belmont, approaching her with a face full of thoughtful sympathy.

"My dear Mrs. Belmont, how very glad I am to see you!" said Mrs. Wade. "This is really an unexpected pleasure, for I had not expected you to be able to return calls in these days of your affliction, when you are necessarily so much confined at home. Take this chair," wheeling forward a capacious, velvet-cushioned rocker; "it is so much more comfortable than that you have selected. Sit over the register, too. I know just how penetrating the cold is, for I have been out this afternoon, myself. How is the sick husband?"

"Much the same, thank you," replied Mrs. Belmont, in her quiet, ladylike manner. "His left side continues hopelessly inanimate, but his right side is much better, and his brain was never clearer than it is now. In many respects he is much improved from what he was at first, but——"

"There is little hope of his ever getting off that bed, I suppose," said Mrs. Wade, as her visitor hesitated from excess of emotion. "Oh! it seems such a pity, doesn't it? And yet I know that no one is more assured than you are, my dear Mrs. Belmont, that our Father in heaven knows best. What would we do—how could we bear these things—if it were not for the gracious promises of the good old book? My husband said, the last time he visited Dr. Belmont, that he thought he had never seen so happy a Christian as the Doctor—lying there on his bed so helpless and full of suffering day



after day, and yet so bright, so filled with rich thought, with such song in his soul! That is just the way Mr. Wade expressed it. And he said that he came home refreshed and strengthened beyond expression, and with material for two or three sermons. Said he: 'I went to minister, but I was ministered unto.' They miss him, Mrs. Belmont, they miss him sorely all over town. He used to be such a help in the ministers' meetings. Mr. Wade said that he had a special faculty for moving things."

"Thank you *so* much," said Mrs. Belmont, smiling through her tears. "Your kind words help me more than I have words to express. There come times in the lives of us all when we especially need the ministry of believers."

'Into each life some rain must fall,  
Some days must be dark and dreary.'

The rainy days have come to us in more senses than one, Mrs. Wade. Our financial prospects are very cloudy and dark. Our expenses are extremely heavy."

"They certainly must be," said Mrs. Wade, sympathetically.

"You will not wonder, knowing this, that I find it necessary to help a little," continued the visitor, trying to get above the pain of speaking of her distresses to others. "I have done nicely at dressmaking in my time, and I thought that, if I might have your patronage and also that of some other influential ladies of the city, I might again do something to lift the burden which is getting too heavy for our good son Harold to bear."



Little Mrs. Wade's eyes shone with unshed tears as she grasped the hand of her visitor and assured her of her most hearty help and her widest influence.

"You know," said she, "I have two young daughters who are almost large enough to think that they must have everything; and I have a host of lovely Christian ladies on my list of acquaintances who will love to do anything in the world for you. How soon can you begin?"

"My dear friend," replied Mrs. Belmont, rising, for she was in haste to depart, "I will begin just as soon as I can get the material to begin on."

"Then I will bring you the wherewithal to-morrow. And, dear Mrs. Belmont, if there is anything that I can do for you, please let me know. I shall consider it a favor. Don't stand on ceremony. Remember that we are all the Lord's stewards. 'The silver and the gold are his.'"

Mrs. Belmont bent over and gave the little lady a warm kiss in answer. Then she turned hastily away, and went down the steps into the street, Mrs. Wade looking after her with swimming eyes as she thought of the missionary meeting and its 'wayside ministries.'



## CHAPTER XXIV.

### *MAMIE'S YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIETY.*

A WHOLE year had passed away since that sad Sunday when Dr. Belmont was stricken in his pulpit with paralysis. They were all getting used to seeing him lying among the pillows now, the pale, quiet sufferer; quite used to seeing another minister make *his* pastoral calls, and preach each Sabbath morning and evening in his pulpit; used to having a night nurse come in at six o'clock in the evening and go away at six in the morning; used to the lights and fires burning all night, the footsteps passing to and fro in the midst of their dreams, and the dark days when pain reigned in the quiet room, and the children had to sit in the dining-room and talk in whispers.

These days of extreme pain were growing fewer, however, and the patient was really improving. He would never be able to walk again, but there were times when the nurse could lift him into his invalid chair, in whose soft depths he could sit, perhaps, for half-an-hour at a time. His left arm and leg were crippled and useless, but his right gradually gained in strength, and his nerves became very much better, so that a certain amount of company was not only allowable, but desirable. The active brain longed to see and know something of the outside world; pined to be still of use to the perishing; and visitors of all degrees were most gladly welcomed by the good Doc-



tor. It was a pity that the visitors did not realize what a blessing they brought with them, and come oftener; but they were such a busy people, most of them, that they soon found it burdensome to slip in frequently and see their old pastor; and days dragged heavily to the shut-in minister.

To Mamie and Brownie papa lived in bed; and to knock at his door two or three times every day, and to be told by his soft, pleasant voice to "come in," was going visiting. They liked nothing half so well as to tiptoe in and seat themselves on the side of his bed, and entertain him with the bits of news that children so dearly love to tell. They were fond, also, of taking their spare pennies and stealing off up street, hand in hand, to "buy poor papa something nice." Sometimes it was an orange, or a bunch of Malaga grapes; but oftener it was a small package of fancy crackers to soak in his milk, for papa was not allowed tea and coffee. These they would place in a dainty glass dish beside the flowered china bowl which held his milk, and bear it in to him on the little waiter for a "picnic"; and papa would enjoy it every bit as much as they did.

They had now grown used, too, to Kate and Ward being away; and to Nellie's hard, hacking cough and feeble step; and to mamma making a sewing-room of the sitting-room; to the ladies coming in round by the side door at all hours of the day to have their dresses tried on; to the piles of shimmering silks and other rich fabrics, with attendant laces and ribbons, lying on chairs and tables: and to the sewing-



machine going all day long with its busy click, click, click; and to the little sign over the door:

“MRS. LUCIA BELMONT, DRESSMAKER.”

It was in the long summer vacation that it first came into Mamie's mind. I think that the dear Lord must have had something to do with it, too, for no one had dropped a word that could have started such an idea; but Mamie was a thoughtful little girl, and it came into her mind, as I said, one morning in the summer, while she was lying in the hammock with Brownie, gazing lazily up into the blue sky with the fleecy white clouds sailing through it like little white ships on the boundless depths of old ocean. She was a very sympathetic child, and had felt “papa's lonely Sundays” very much. After morning prayers, which were always held in his room, and in which they all joined, there was neither song nor service, except that mamma and the children sometimes sang some selections from memory in the gloaming. Mamie and Brownie did the best that they could to bring home with them the Sunday-school lesson and the sermon; but it was a very pitiful little effort, and in despair they soon abandoned it. Once they even went so far as to go up to the new minister, hand in hand, and to ask him, in a very weak, plaintive little voice, if he wouldn't please come and preach papa a little sermon; and the minister laid his young hand upon their heads, smiled into their tearful eyes, and promised very readily; but I regret to add that he forgot it the next moment, and those two blessed children



looked down the street in vain for him all that whole, long week! They never had the courage to ask him again. All these things might have brought the thought into Mamie's dear little head, for all that I know; but I like to think that there was the ministry of angels about it, too.

It came all at once, like an inspiration, and she jumped up and shook Brownie—for that was one of Mamie's strange little ways when she was excited—until his ringlets fairly flew about his head like spun gold.

"You precious little darling!" she exclaimed, rapturously, "I've thought of just the loveliest something. Come out into the arbor, where we can talk it over. Oh, my!"

Brownie's two little black-stockinged legs fairly flew out of the hammock, and his big straw hat—worn to preserve his complexion—was hastily dumped over his curls, hinder side before, with the anchor ribbons falling over his face, while his anxious "Wait, Mamie!" rang out after the little sister, who had started in advance.

"Sit down here, Brownie, and don't interrupt a single word," said Mamie, upon reaching the arbor. "If mamma lets us, we are going to have a Young People's Society."

"What for, and where?" asked Brownie, breathlessly.

"Now, Doll," said Mamie, conferring upon him a favorite pet name, "I want you to hush until I get entirely through; then, if you want to talk, you can. Of course it's for papa, and it's to be in his room on Sunday afternoons.



As many people as can get into his room will be in it, and those who can't will have to sit outside, of course. Let me see—who'll we have? There are the Benton girls and boys right across the alley from us; there are six of them, and they never go to Sunday-school or any such place. Then there are Ralph and Myra Decker, and the Clinton boys—three of them—and I guess that Pussie Lawrence will come, if her mother will let her. She is the sweetest little darling, I think! You know what a Young People's Society is, Brownie? Like the one that we have at the church. You went with me one time a good while ago. We have flower committees and lookout committees and sunshine committees; and papa will love to help the poor folks, you know, because you know, Doll, that's what a Young People's Society is for—to help Jesus take care of folks and make them good. Won't it be beautiful?"

"Yes," said the little boy, nodding his head wisely, "it will be very bootiful; but it would be a good deal bootifuller if Jesus was here to go wiv us."

"Why, he does go with us every single time," said Mamie, with wide-open eyes. "Don't you remember last Sunday night mamma read and talked about the promises, and this was one of them: 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world'?"

"It would seem more like as if he were wiv us, though," replied Brownie, "if we could see him and hold his hand, don't you think, Mamie? Do you expect him to your Young People's Society, Mamie?"



"Of course," said the little girl, with shining eyes. "It wouldn't be of the least account without him. You have a great deal to learn, I see, Brownie."

"S'pose we go in and ask mamma about the s'ciety, Mamie," suggested the little man, not altogether relishing his sister's last remark.

No sooner said than done. Their light feet skipped into the sewing-room gleefully.

"Mamma! Nellie! we've thought of something! at least, *I* have," added Mamie, who, like most little girls, wished to claim the credit for all her original ideas.

"Well," said mamma, encouragingly, laying some goods on her lapboard, and beginning to cut out a cunning little jacket with her shining big shears, "put this dress on the lounge, dear."

Mamie took the pretty dress and laid it away very carefully, admiring its handsome folds with an outspoken wish that she had one just like it. Then she added: "Oh! mamma, it is something so nice for papa's lonely Sunday afternoons—a Young People's Society."

Then away went her tongue enumerating the good things connected with it.

"Do you think papa can endure it, mamma?" asked Nellie. "I know that we have been trying for ever so long to think of something that would make the Sabbath afternoons more enjoyable to him; but I don't know. It would be lovely, if he could bear it."

"I haven't a doubt but that it would be an uplift to him," said Mrs. Belmont. "He has always been such a busy, busy man, and he



misses these things so much. Besides, he will make it a means to reach out and help others. He lies there and thinks and thinks, and with no assurance that it will end in anything but thought. You may slip in and ask him, anyway, my darlings. It will do no harm to go that far."

Mamie and Brownie slipped in accordingly, but they were not gone a great while. When they came out, the tears were rolling down Mamie's face, and Brownie was wiping his eyes with his tiny handkerchief in a very suspicious manner.

"He—our papa—bressed us," said Brownie, choking with emotion. "He put his hand on our heads, and said bootiful words about the dear Jesus keeping us like lambs in the fold, and like little chickies under his wings; and we cried, didn't us, Mamie?"

"And he prayed such a pretty prayer for us, too," said Mamie. "He asked the dear Lord to help us to make a very Christ-like society; and we're going to begin it right away, mamma. I've a great notion to ask old Ben Batt. He's a real kind, queer old fellow, with a wooden leg, you know; but he comes to our church; and whenever I go by his house, he's always sitting out on the porch and singing hymns and the like; and he always calls to me and asks how papa is. I think he is a real nice old man."

"Yes," said Brownie, sympathetically, "he is so."

"All right," said mamma, smiling, "just so you don't get more than we can take care of."



I suppose, though, that we can throw open the sitting-room if we have an overflow."

"Papa's apartment is quite roomy," said Nellie, "and will probably hold all who will come."

For the next few days the children were extremely busy, and when Sunday afternoon came papa's room presented a most festive appearance. Hanging baskets hung in the two windows, filled with ferns and sprays of English ivy, and every vase in the house was filled with flowers, and the room was fragrant with them. The upright piano had been wheeled into the large hall, right before the open door, where papa could see it very plainly, and a pile of song-books lay invitingly upon it. Chairs from the other rooms were brought in, and arranged in a semicircle facing the bed, which had been wheeled around so that the Doctor could catch a glimpse, every now and then, of the sweet summer life peering in through the open doors and windows. He had his dinner early, and Mamie herself brushed his hair with the greatest nicety. Mamie took care, too, to wipe the dinner dishes for Betty Ann Andrews, the hired girl, so that she could put on her Sunday dress and come in; and pretty soon everything was ready. They all came—the Bentons and Clintons, Ralph and Myra Decker, little Pussie Lawrence, and even old Ben Batt with his wooden leg and loud greeting. He stumped over to shake hands with the sick man as soon as he came in, saying, with a kind of fierce earnestness: "Hol-loa, Parson! Going home in a chariot, I see; going home in a chariot! I kin hear the wheels a'ready a rollin' down the avenues of glory for



ye. I've heerd you preach many a time, Parson. You've done old Ben's soul a heap of good—lifted it up and gi'n it a sight of the glory-circled throne. Now old Ben's come to preach to you, and his sarmon is, 'Praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works onto the children of men.' ”

“Yes, yes,” feebly responded the sick man, pressing, with what strength he had, the horny old hand that he held; “‘For he is good, and his mercy endureth for ever.’ ”

“Aye!” exclaimed old Ben, clapping his hands, and immediately bursting into song:

“When we've been there ten thousand years,  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we first begun.”

It was a blessed little meeting, and its influence went out beyond the home circle, and widened like the wavelets of the sea. Old Ben went home refreshed, to sing over again the songs that he had learned, and carried in his great, rough, homely hand a bunch of roses for the little colored baby down the alley; while sweet and fragrant in the heart of each one present were the words uttered by the good minister—words which were the beginning of a better life in many.

And thus it began, the Young People's Society, to which so many flocked in the weeks to come as to cause an overflow in the sitting-room almost every time. It was from this little society that there first sprang an interest in the forsaken district of Red alley, where the lost were rescued in great numbers, the needy were



succored, and an uplift was given to scores of young men and boys who were losing their bearings in the sea of life, and drifting toward the breakers without knowledge. In fact, it gave Dr. Belmont an opportunity to carry out a number of his benevolent thoughts, and did him more good than medicine.

Said he one day to his wife: "Lucia, I have had nothing help me so much as Mamie's society. I can see already an awakening among the young people that I believe will go on to deep fruition. Oh! wouldn't it be wonderful, dear wife, if here, upon my back in bed, I should live to see the greatest revival of religion that I have ever witnessed? Somehow, I feel that the Spirit of the Lord is brooding over the face of the deep."

And it was so, for in the following winter a revival began around his humble bed that took hold of every church in Oakland, and spread out into the surrounding country.



## CHAPTER XXV.

*SADIE SLOAN.*

NO doubt the reader remembers the girl of angular form and awkward presence who was enrolled among Kate's pupils at Clinton. Ignorant and uncultured, she was also a clever girl, and of such an investigating disposition that she was continually leading Kate into a maze of troubles with her questions, especially about religion—a subject in which her understanding much more than her heart was interested. She was a bold thinker and a rapid talker, and had a roystering way with her that made the boys give her the name of “Sally Tomboy.” There was a strange power about her, too—an indefinable element of the soul—that made her able to lead the majority of the school at will, though she was no favorite among them, and they did not treat her well.

Perhaps it was this power that steeled Kate's heart against her; perhaps it was this that made Kate pass her by when she had dainty gifts of painting or embroidery to confer upon the girls, and handsome little booklets to distribute at Christmas time, with nothing but a card or a handful of candy for Sadie. Twice Kate had had a little evening gathering at Mrs. Knox's, and, if it had not been for the gentle lady herself, poor Sadie would have been left out in the cold. When the warm spring days



began to make the out-of-door world beautiful, Kate hired a covered spring-wagon, and took the girls, all but Sadie, out to "The Glen" one Saturday for a delightful picnic. Did Sadie feel it? No one could have known that she did. She was just as gay and full of her fun as ever; and when asked by one of the girls if she did not feel badly because she was not invited, she said: "No, indeed. I am not at all fond of going where I am not wanted. I am going to have a picnic at home helping my mother sew carpet-rags."

One day in the latter part of April something happened. A terrible storm arose—one of those terrific thunder-storms which spring so suddenly out of an almost cloudless sky. It had been such a beautiful day. The children were scattered all over the yard at play, for it was the afternoon recess. An ominous black cloud suddenly obscured the sun. Within ten minutes it had spread like a pall across the sky, and from it there came the terrific roar of a powerful wind, accompanied by flashes of zigzag lightning, and followed by such awful thunder-crashes as rocked the old school-building, and even broke the glass in several of the windows. Terror-stricken, the pupils crowded into the school-rooms, the little ones fleeing to their teachers for protection. Miss Richie gathered her little flock about her, and quietly strove to allay their fears by reminding them that God rides upon the storm, and that his own dear Son once said to the roaring winds and waves that wondrous "Peace, be still."

As for Kate, she had not seen the clouds in



time to close the door and windows, and everything was in a state of terrible confusion. Books and papers were flying about from one end of the room to the other, and the ashes from the stove were making a cloud of dust. She had not Miss Richie's faith to uphold her, and she stood helpless among her frightened pupils, in the awful darkness of the storm, unable to say a word to encourage or comfort them. Not so Sadie Sloan. She flew to the windows and the door, and, calling upon the boys to help her, closed them; then, gathering the smaller of the pupils about her, she began to entertain them with funny stories and riddles. In the midst of it all Miss Richie came in hurriedly, with a startling question on her lips: "Are Mamie Ross and Janie Hempstead and Mina Bell in your room, Miss Belmont? I have just this minute missed them."

Sadie Sloan spoke up at once: "They are in the vacant room, I'll bet you a dollar! They have a play-house in there—a prime one—I helped them fix it up myself. Bless their little hearts! It's very strange they didn't run right out when the storm began. Holloa! there's something against the door," she continued, as she gave it a violent push and found it resistive. "Dave Edwards, you and Charlie Edison set your shoulders against it. Listen! you can hear the little ones calling. Poor babies!" Then, as the door gave way before their united efforts, and opened enough to admit a passage, Sadie exclaimed: "They are half-buried among the ruins of their play-house! My goodness! Miss Belmont—Miss Richie—the whole thing



is going to pieces! A great pile of bricks has fallen from the chimney through the stovepipe hole, and that's what's blocking up the door! The windows have tumbled in or out, and the wind is tearing through like mad! Lots of the plastering has fallen, and the rest of it looks as if it was going to fall in a minute!"

Miss Richie, pale with affright, tried to press forward through the terrified children, but they caught her dress and held her fast; Kate said something, but the roar and din of the storm deadened the sound of her voice. The girls screamed and cried, and the boys shouted. Every one had known the untrustworthiness of that old vacant room; the directors had been warned in regard to it again and again. It was not really a part of the main building, but was an old affair which had been roughly joined on to accommodate an overflow of pupils. The windows were crazy, with half the panes of glass gone; bricks from the chimney were continually tumbling; and the foundation was crumbling into decay. It had been prophesied many times that a big storm of wind would sweep the whole structure away.

"Quick, boys!" exclaimed Sadie, spiritedly. "Those little girls are actually buried alive. It's a wonder they are living. If that plastering above their heads falls, they will not be. Don't waste another minute. Go in and get them while I hold this door open. It'll slam to again in a minute."

The boys hesitated. The rain was pouring in at the windows in sheets, the old desks were being blown about by the violence of the wind,



and hanging and swaying to and fro was the broken plastering.

One of the boys stepped forward, then drew back.

"It ain't only the plastering," said he, "it is rotten wood, too. There's a decayed beam that is going to fall, as sure as fate. I don't know as I want to risk my neck under it."

"Get away, then, and let me!" exclaimed the intrepid Sadie, flinging the boys aside and rushing forward into the midst of the pouring rain, the roaring wind, and the dazzling lightning. She reached the children, and, tearing away the debris which almost concealed them from view, lifted them out, not much hurt, but paralyzed by fright, and carried them to the door of the school-room, where they were received by several pairs of outstretched arms. It was all done so quickly that no one had a chance to interpose, or to aid the bold girl, who, just as she lifted the last child from among the debris of the play-house, caught her foot and fell. At the same instant the plastering fell also, knocking the child out of Sadie's arms, and completely burying her. The rotten beam, too, came down and struck Sadie on the back. The boys hesitated no longer. They all rushed forward together, followed closely by Miss Richie and Kate. They raised the little girl, who was cut on the head and was bleeding, and carried her into the school-room; then they fell to work pulling the fallen plastering off the heroic girl, whom it had so cruelly covered. It was four or five minutes before they could release her, and then they found her, not



dead, as they had every reason to fear, not even unconscious, but so dreadfully hurt! Her head was cut in several places, her right arm was broken, and her back—oh! that was the worst! The beam had evidently done its work. She cried out in the most anguished manner as they tried to raise her as gently as possible, and it was with the greatest difficulty that they managed to carry her into the school-room and lay her upon an improvised bed made of the boys' coats. The storm had lulled but little, but they did not now stop to think of that for a moment, and half-a-dozen of the boys rushed off in search of Dr. Joy, while the teachers did their best for the suffering girl, and the pupils stood sobbing around.

"Sadie was so good," they said, over and over again, "and we treated her mean! Do you remember when she took off her shawl that awful cold day and put it on little Lizzie Benton because we were plaguing Lizzie about not having half enough to wear? And can you ever forget how she stuck up for Joe Wells and helped him with his examples, when we all despised him so because he is slow and stupid, and wouldn't let him play with us? Seems as if she always made us ashamed of being mean by just daring to do right; and now she's killed! She dies in doing good to others; and we will never get over it as long as we live."

"Don't make such a fuss over me," said Sadie, as Miss Richie knelt by her side trying to soothe the agonizing pain by every means in her power, and Kate stood by looking helplessly on with troubled eyes; "I ain't worth it; I ain't anybody; I never did anything good for



the Lord Jesus Christ in my life. I'm just kind naturally, and don't like to see folks imposed upon; but I'm not a Christian, and they are the only ones who are going to get into the kingdom. 'Thy kingdom come' he said that we are to pray, didn't he? I never could pray that, for if he's a king, he's rich, and I'm afraid he won't want me. I ain't fit in no way to live among princes and such. It don't matter. I would have liked to have understood some things better, but Miss Belmont couldn't bother with me. I don't blame her—I don't blame nobody. I've thought to go to meeting more, but mother's too poor to fix me up to look like anything, and these clothes made folks ashamed for me. I don't wonder. I don't blame anybody; but that's one thing I'll be real glad to die for—there won't be any more trouble about clothes. It's getting a little dark; I can't see you very well; if—if only some one would pray."

These words had been spoken in a low, faint tone, and with great difficulty. Miss Richie looked at Kate.

"She is yours, my dear," said she, softly.

But Kate hid her face in her hands, crying out: "Oh! don't, don't ask me, Miss Richie! I cannot pray; indeed, I cannot; I really don't know how!"

Miss Richie looked at Kate again, this time compassionately. She had seen—how could she help it?—that her partner in school-work was not her partner in religious life. Still, it was Miss Richie's way to throw a mantle over the faults of people, to make charitable excuses of all sorts for them; so, although she wished



with all her heart that it were otherwise, she said nothing further to Kate, but bent over the injured girl, with the words: "Sadie, are you willing that the Lord Jesus Christ should save you just as you are?"

It was evidently very hard for the poor girl to reply, but she raised the hand which was not helpless, and pointed upward while she repeated earnestly a fragment of the hymn—

"Just as I am, without one plea  
But that thy blood was shed for me."

"You believe Jesus to be able as well as willing?" asked Miss Richie, wiping the trickling blood from the head which they had bandaged as well as they could.

Another faint smile and these words came from Sadie: "He raised the dead; he cast out devils; oh, yes; I know Jesus *can* save me."

"Then, Sadie, will you be saved?" inquired Miss Richie, her heart in sympathy with the angels.

A strange look appeared on the girl's face.

"I wish," said she, "that I could say 'yes' right out. I want to be saved—of course I do. Everybody does when they come to die. It is not pleasant not to be sure of it. But something seems to be holding me; it seems as if I can't give myself up. Miss Belmont," suddenly fixing her dimming eyes on the teacher sadly regarding her, "if you could try to pray for me, I might be able. Would you?"

Kate fell upon her knees, and burst into an agony of tears.

"Sadie, dear," she sobbed, "don't mind me; I am not worth a thought. If you only can



forgive me for being so unkind to you, it is all I ask. I never realized what I was doing. I am sorry. I shall never get over this. I will do anything in the world that I can to help you, if you only can look up, and think only of yourself. Oh! Miss Richie, it is so dreadful—so dreadful!”

“Pray,” gasped the dying girl, clinging to Kate’s hand.

“Oh! Sadie,” said Kate, the garments of pride falling off from her in the solemn presence of death, “I am not fit to lead you to Jesus. I confess to you that I am obliged to go back and learn the first principles, myself. I fear that I have been very wrong in calling myself a Christian at all.”

Sadie’s lips were growing cold. Still she implored: “If you would only pray once for me; if you would only go with me a little way. It’s all so dark, and I love you.”

Kate kissed the hand which she held—the hand which had been such an unselfish, helpful one; the hand which had done her so many kindnesses—and, bowing her face upon it, prayed, with an anguished heart: “O Lord, if a prayer from me will do one bit of good, please accept it. Don’t let me be a stumbling-block in Sadie’s way. I am so sorry and wretched that I might have led her to thee, and have not done it. Save her for Jesus’ sake.”

As Kate looked up, the dying girl smiled radiantly, and said: “Tell mother I wish I could have kissed her.”

Then the smile faded, the breath receded, and Sadie Sloan lay in their midst in the calm, beautiful sleep of the righteous dead.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

### *KATE AT SEA.*

THE grief of the pupils burst forth afresh, and in the midst of it the door opened and Dr. Joy stepped in. Behind him, with wild eyes and uncovered head, came the poor mother of the dead girl, just as she had risen up from her work and hurried away at the call. Something within Kate moved her to go to Mrs. Sloan and wind both arms kindly, and even tenderly, about her. She could not speak a word, but her grief-stricken silence was much more eloquent. The poor woman gazed stonily in Kate's face, then threw up her hands, and cried out in the agony of her heart: "You needn't say a word, Miss Belmont; I see it in your face; Sadie's dead. Don't hold me; please don't hold me! Don't try to hide her from me! She was all I had left of seven. Husband and children all gone; only me left. Oh! merciful God, take me, too!" And she threw herself down beside the body of her darling, moaning piteously and rocking herself to and fro.

"Be comforted, my poor woman," said Dr. Joy, laying a kind hand on the stricken mother. "Sadie died gloriously—as heroes die. She saved three lives, and she herself has entered into life eternal. Sadie was always a good girl, but she has rendered herself immortal. 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.'"

By this time quite a little multitude was pouring into the school-house from different quarters



of the village, for such news travels fast, and, though the storm was yet somewhat violent, even very delicate women had braved it, and had come to console and comfort and help as best they could. Notwithstanding their utmost endeavors, however, it was a long time before they could persuade the half-crazed mother to allow all that remained of poor Sadie to be removed to her home and prepared for burial. Meanwhile, the children who had been rescued from death by her brave and dauntless act were taken to their homes, and Dr. Joy attended carefully to the injuries of the little girl who was hurt, which proved not to be serious; and soon the school-house was left to the teachers and their pupils. There was no more teaching for that day, however; only a brief consultation between the two teachers, and the school was dismissed until after Sadie's funeral. Yet Kate lingered long after the last pupil had left the school-room. The storm had passed, and a glorious rainbow encircled the sky; and as Kate stood in the open door and gazed at it with a swelling heart, a passage from the lesson which Mr. Knox had read at worship that morning came forcibly to her mind: "I, even I, am he that comforteth you. Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy Maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth?"

The sun was gliding fast toward the western hills, but the golden glory of its beams shimmered through the raindrops hanging heavy



on shrub and tree, making glittering diamonds of them, and shining on the innumerable little pools of water which surrounded the school-house, transforming them into little silvery lakes. Kate clasped her hands together painfully. They were shapely hands, fair and white, but they looked cruel to her as she thought of the little real good they had accomplished. "If he had come for me instead of poor Sadie, he would have found me unprepared to meet him, and ashamed before him," she moaned to herself. "Oh! why, why have I forgotten my Maker? How could I have hated poor Sadie so, when she was one of his creatures, and he loved her? Why did I put her off instead of trying my very best to make her understand? Why is it that, when she asked me questions about Jesus, my heart grew so cold, and I refused to tell her what she sought so eagerly to know? And now it is too late; she has entered in before me, and, if what I read and hear is true, needs no teaching. Oh! why did God make me with this evil disposition? Why could not *my* heart have been tender and true and gentle like Sadie's? There is something strange about it. I seem fated to be disagreeable. I cannot even make friends like other girls. People love Miss Richie; they admire me for what they call my 'smartness,' and I awe them and make them fear me. They are not drawn to me, and my heart does not go out to them. It lies like a senseless thing in my bosom. Is it my fault that I am not lovable and cannot love, or is it the fault of my Creator?"



The April afternoon waned, the sun went down, and Kate aroused from her dreams, and turned away from the door with a long, tired sigh. Gathering her books together, she went carefully about, neatly arranging everything in the room. When all was done, she put on her hat and walked—not in the direction of home, but across the common where the boys played base-ball, and down the little side street where, near the ill-smelling tannery, there lived, just this morning, poor Sadie Sloan. Upon reaching the little cottage, she found that most of the neighbors had gone, one woman remaining for company. The rooms had been hastily tidied up, and in the front one, between the two small-paned windows, lay all that remained of poor Sadie. The quiet, serene look which so often rests upon the faces of the dead was settled upon the plain countenance, giving it an uplifted look to Kate, who seemed to see the flitting of the soul once more as she stood beside the silent form and gazed, in rapt, unbroken thought at her whom she had so despised, and who had turned into an angel before her very eyes.

“I wished so much that I had a white dress to put on her,” sobbed the stricken mother, stealing up to Kate’s side. “Sadie always loved white so much. But I haven’t a cent of money to buy her one, so we had to put on her new dark calico. I’m so glad I got it made. I sat up right late last night to do it—I don’t know why. She scolded me right hard for doing it; but somehow I couldn’t feel satisfied not to have it done before I went to bed. Ah! well,



my child, it doesn't much matter; you'll have on a white dress up there; I expect you've got it a'ready. Mrs. Knox is going to bring some flowers. I did so want a white one to put in her hand. They are going to send for Mr. Percival to preach the funeral. I'm so glad, for Sadie had a fancy for him. Must you go, Miss Belmont? I wish you could stay a spell. It's lonely; and Sadie thought so much of you. She learned more of you than of any teacher she ever had."

This simple talk almost broke Kate's heart. What right had she to these crumbs of comfort? She turned white to the very lips as she pressed the hand of the poor mother, and whispered, in a broken voice, that she must go home for a little while; that there was something she must do; that then she would return, and stay until all was over.

Once in her own room at Mrs. Knox's, she took from her wardrobe a beautiful dress of white mull, and wrapped it in paper. Then she went in search of Mrs. Knox.

"I am going to stay with Sadie and her mother until they take her away," Kate explained, brokenly; "it is all that I can do."

Although Mrs. Knox tried to dissuade her, she could not prevail. Once more Kate traversed the streets, and entered the lonely house.

"I want you to have this put on her," she said to Mrs. Sloan, exhibiting the beautiful white dress; "and she shall have the white roses. I commissioned Mr. Knox to telegraph to the city and have them sent by express. Don't thank me. If, as you say, she loved me,



she would not hinder me from doing this much for her as a return—and such a poor return.”

So Sadie was arrayed in Kate's own spotless robe of white, the lace falling over the quiet bosom as if it loved it; and then Kate made the mourning mother lie down, while she watched beside the dead, in company with the other woman. It was a long and lonely vigil; but to Kate, who was still far out at sea amid the wild tempest of her remorseful thoughts and feelings, it seemed that it would last forever, and that day would never dawn. At last the red and gold began to tint the eastern sky, but Kate was as far as ever from the haven of rest; indeed, it seemed to her that she was rushing through the seething billows of her soul's wretchedness straight upon the roaring breakers.



## CHAPTER XXVII.

### *MR. PERCIVAL'S COUNSEL.*

**T**O do Kate justice, we believe that she did everything she could, within the last few days, to comfort the heart of the widowed mother and to make up for the unkind feelings with which she had regarded poor Sadie. It was to her that the afflicted woman turned for advice in even the simplest matters. Should the floral wreath which Mrs. Knox had sent be placed on the head or the foot of the casket? Would she please put the white roses and smilax in the folded hands? What would they sing at the funeral? No one knew Sadie's favorite hymns as well as Kate did, and Mr. Percival wanted to know.

Miss Richie called in the forenoon, and she and Kate made knots of black ribbon, which were designed to be fastened upon the sleeve of each one of the pupils, who were requested to attend the funeral in a body.

It was a beautiful afternoon that they laid her away. The trees were all aglow with blossoms, the grass was green and velvety; and as Kate looked at them, she thought of the life which had not faded from among them, but had burst into the beauty and glory of the springtime of an eternal life. As she stood by the open grave in the serene little grave-yard, shadowy with weeping willows and sighing evergreens, and listened to the sweet solemnity of Mr. Percival's voice as he committed the



body of poor Sadie to the care and keeping of the "Resurrection and the Life," she wished—oh! *how* she wished!—that she was as sure of awaking in the likeness of the blessed Christ as she felt Sadie to be that day. The tormenting doubts, which she had tried so hard to dissipate by keeping busy for the last two days, seemed to return with redoubled fury and to chase her soul up and down the avenues of thought.

Wishing to be alone, she walked homeward through the fields—the graveyard lying out a little beyond the limits of the village—and, fancying the shadow of an oak tree, she sat herself down in its spreading shade. The bitter tears rolled over her face as her mind traversed the past: What a drag she had been to Harold, what an influence to Ward, what an example to the younger children; how she had obstinately made up her mind that her stepmother was of a prying and mischievous disposition, disposed to be cruel to the children, and the supplanter of them all in her father's confidence and affection; how she had steeled her heart against them, and how willing she had been that the whole burden and responsibility of caring for the family should fall upon her stepmother. The knowledge of the special effort which the struggling woman was making had never awakened any softer feelings in her heart. She had even meanly said, in the solitude of her own room, "It is good enough for her." She had felt a sort of wicked triumph in Ward's departure from home, and would not believe Harold's glad accounts of the favorable change in him. Sitting thus alone, wrapped in



these sad and unsatisfying reflections, she did not notice the sun growing low in the west, nor did she hear footsteps approaching, until some one stopped beside her, and a gentle voice said: "Miss Katie, you here, and alone?"

She looked up then, and met Mr. Percival's eyes bent upon her with grave kindness. She turned away her head to hide her troubled, tear-stained face. She felt just then that she could not speak even to him.

"Are you in any personal trouble that I can help you about?" he asked, sitting down in the soft grass by her side, "or is it for poor Sadie that you are shedding these tears? It is very sad, and yet it is scarcely right to weep for her, I think, or to wish her back among us? She has escaped the 'evil to come,' and has gone home to her Father's house in triumph. If she had lived, life, with her, would have been a constant battle with poverty and we know not what. It is so much better as it is. No doubt you feel about her as few others can. You have been her teacher, and I know by experience that we are very apt to become much attached to those we help in any way; but——"

"*Don't!*" The word escaped her involuntarily. "You mistake; you don't know what you are saying. I was not Sadie's friend; I was not good to her. It hurts me now to think that I was not; but I almost hated her. Oh! you need not look at me in that surprised kind of a way; it is true. She wore shabby old dresses, and her hair was cut short in the neck, and she was not a bit like any of the other girls. Besides, she had too much influence; she could



lead most of the pupils like a flock of sheep, and make them do whatever she had a mind to, whether they wanted to or not, that I couldn't bear it; and she had such a way of asking me such troublesome questions about religion. I couldn't answer them, and it made me ashamed. She said that I helped her so much with her lessons, but I did a great deal more for the little German boys than I did for her; and—and, Mr. Percival, that was not all. I tried to hurt her feelings, to throw her off from me, to set the other girls against her, and to slight her in every way that I could. Mr. Percival, you will despise me as I despise myself, now that you know this, but I cannot hold it in my heart any longer. If only folks could sometimes live their lives over again! It sometimes seems to me that it is not in Almighty Love to save *me*."

"Kate!" Mr. Percival's voice was almost stern in its earnestness, "you are making the mistake of your life in doubting the power of that same Almighty Love. You are not right; I have long seen that. You have been cherishing a very painful disorder; but the question is, not, Can you be healed? but, Will you have the Healer? Will you let the Great Physician bind up your soul with the balm of Gilead? It is well enough for you to realize your dangerous condition, but you have no right to refuse the medicine which the Saviour offers you. I know, and you know, that the blessed Christ is right here to attend to your every need. Is it not written expressly that 'He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him'? It is only for you to come."



Kate looked up. "There is more written than that," she said, drawing her hand away from the strong clasp of the one that he had laid upon it. "There is something about being reconciled to your brother before coming to the altar with your gift. That has been troubling me, too. I have heard my father preach on that, and you, too. I know what it means. You have been good enough not to refer to it, but you know of my feelings toward my father's wife and her children. This, also, is in the way of my peace. Mr. Percival, how can I—how dare I—come to God and ask forgiveness for the sins and mistakes of a lifetime, when I cannot find it in my heart to forgive them for coming into our family? How can I expect him to love me, when I don't love them, and don't want to? There it is. You see I have spoken it out, and you know it all, and you now know me as you never have known me before. You see yourself how hopeless it is."

"I do not, Katie. Tell me, has not the Spirit suggested to you a way in which this obstacle to your eternal happiness may be removed?"

Kate looked at him again through falling tears, bit her lip passionately, and turned away her head.

"Has he not brought to your remembrance the words of the prodigal son: 'I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned'?"

"Oh! Mr. Percival, I can never do that—never! I cannot undergo the humiliation of going to them at home, and especially to *her*, and making the confession that I have been in



the wrong. It would be an utter impossibility."

"It is never impossible to do right," replied Mr. Percival, kindly, and even tenderly. "It may be hard; I know from my own experience that it often is; but I know also that it is possible to do anything which Jesus Christ wants us to do; for 'the Spirit helpeth our infirmities,' you know; and I really do think, Katie, that if I were standing where you stand to-day, I shouldn't hesitate; I should do this thing; I should do it firmly, resolutely, without making a single compromise with my mind or heart. You will never have a moment's peace until you do. It is your first duty, a plain act of restitution; and in order to get right with your Father in heaven and in a position in which he can bestow a blessing, it seems to me that you will be obliged to do it."

"Oh! Mr. Percival, I can't!" said Kate.

"*You can!*" urged the young minister, with Christian pity and tenderness. "Let me tell you something about myself; it may help you. Some years ago I thoughtlessly injured a gentleman's reputation—his religious reputation—by repeating some idle scandal I had heard about him, and letting it pass that I believed it true. The young man's friends fell off; his word was questioned; his honor was at stake; and he was finally brought up before the church for judgment. I knew how really false were the reports which had been circulated, and it was very easy for me to prove them so; but I actually and shamefully hesitated to do it. You understand that I was the chief witness against



him, and you can imagine how painful was my position. In order to right things, I would be obliged to retract everything in the presence of the church. While the case was pending, I wandered about in spiritual darkness. I lost my fellowship with my Father; the Sun of righteousness went under a cloud; and I felt almost like a lost soul. But when the case came up in the church, I did manage to do the gentleman justice. I took back everything, proved the whole thing a fabrication, confessed my thoughtlessness and my irresolution, and begged pardon very humbly, I assure you. It was the most blessed thing that I ever did, too, for I triumphed over self. Jesus returned to me, and I was again happy; but I assure you it was a lesson that I never forgot."

"But it is *so* hard! What would people say?" insisted Kate.

"That is not the point," rejoined Mr. Percival. "You don't want to think of 'people.' Think of your own soul; think of Jesus, and of how you want to be in a position to love and serve him. My dear Katie, you will do this—you certainly will. I shall go home and ask God to help you to do it. Are you ready to go? The sun is almost down."



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### *THE FIRST INGATHERING.*

“MY dear Kate,” said Mrs. Knox, who was watching for them on the front porch as they came slowly through the gate and up the brick walk, “I have just been silly enough to worry about you a little bit. I missed you entirely at the cemetery. Where did you and Arthur slip to? John and I waited for you with the carriage for some time.”

“The fields looked pleasant, and I had a fancy to walk through them on my way home,” answered Kate. “Mr. Percival had the same thought, I presume, for he overtook me by the big tree. I am sorry to have made trouble; I never once thought of the carriage.”

“Now,” said the little woman, giving Kate a loving pat on the hand as she came in, “if you want to be good to me, you won’t say ‘trouble’ another time. Everything is all right—just as right as can be. Come in, and rest a bit before supper. Didn’t you think that the graveyard looked lovely to-day? The grass was so soft and green, and the walks so neat and clean. What a beautiful place they laid poor Sadie away in, didn’t they? I thought that it was so kind in Dr. Joy and Mr. Marshall to buy that pretty lot for poor Mrs. Sloan. You know that the rest of her folks are all buried away down at Ducktown, ever so many miles from here. It is so much nicer for her to have Sadie lying here, where she can visit her grave sometimes.



I thought it was so nice to have the school-children show so much respect; and the knots of ribbon on their sleeves and the flowers they had in their hands to lay on the casket were just the very thing. I liked the song they sang with you at the grave, too; it was such a sweet tribute. Poor, dear Sadie! she has gone where she will understand at last. Arthur, did you notice the little German boys' father? He never once took his eyes off you during the service. I am so anxious for that family. Do you want to go to your room, Katie, and brush a little before supper; never mind keeping us waiting; we're in no hurry."

Chattering thus, more to draw away attention from Kate's tear-stained face than for anything else, Mrs. Knox bustled about, lighting the lamp, turning up the light, then turning it down, wheeling the chairs into different positions, and otherwise pretending to be very busy. Meanwhile, Kate escaped to her room, bathed her face, smoothed her hair, and even changed her dress, that she might appear more her natural self. But the terrible emotions which had convulsed her soul could not be altogether hidden, and Mrs. Knox felt sure that there was something aside from Sadie's sad death which was troubling her; so, as she poured the tea, passed the waffles, and pressed the cold beef upon Arthur for the second time, she kept up a rippling stream of talk which excused the silence of her guests.

"I have found a new family down by the old grist-mill, Arthur," said she. "Have honey with your waffles? No? Oh! you don't know



what's good. The little German boys told me about them. They have moved into that old cabin, John, of Uncle Billy Wilkins, that hasn't been lived in for years except by rats and mice. I don't see how they are going to get along; and there are eleven of them—a regular old-fashioned family. We must try to get the children into the Sabbath-school. You must hustle around in the morning, Arthur, and call on them before you go home. John, you must send round a load of wood and some groceries to-morrow, and I'll hatch up a basket of notions. They have a young baby there, and they ought to have a fire all the time, even in warm weather. If Kate and Arthur can get along by themselves for an hour or two, I believe I'll just take Hetty and run around there yet to-night with a basket of things. It isn't far around by the covered bridge, and the poor things didn't look to me as if they had any too much to eat."

"Had I not better go with you and help with the basket?" asked Arthur. "Judging from what I know of you, I should say it will be far too heavy for you and Hetty to manage."

"Indeed, you will not," said the little lady, emphatically. "You'll sit at home and try to make yourself agreeable to Kate here. John, of course, must meander off to the store as usual."

Arthur laughed, and opened the door for Kate to pass into the parlor, only stopping long enough to promise that he would certainly look after the spiritual needs of the family in question; then he followed her into the parlor,



and, choosing a book from the many beautiful volumes lying on the table, seated himself in an easy chair, saying kindly: "You are weary, I know, and do not care to talk; and, as I am instructed to amuse you, and as I feel that I am somewhat deficient in entertaining qualities this evening, for some reason, I will, with your kind permission, rely upon the minds of others who are greater and wiser than myself. Have you a choice? I see that I have picked up Longfellow's poems. They are pleasant music, and are never amiss. They have an especially soothing effect upon me when I am too tired even to think. Are you fond of *Miles Standish*? I always liked that. Shall I disturb you, do you think?"

"Certainly not," said Kate; and she leaned her head, weary and aching, upon the back of the upholstered chair, folded her hands, and turned her eyes away from the light. The soft, clear, even tones fell musically upon her ears, and her mind was gradually lulled to rest by the beautiful rhythm of the story. Mrs. Knox found them thus when she returned home, and rallied them upon their unsociability.

"You would have enough to talk about if you had seen what I have seen to-night," she said; "a sick woman and a half-starved little baby; the other children scattering about just like rats and mice; and a drunken husband and father, of course. A man can always find enough money to buy whiskey, it seems. Oh! *such* distress! Arthur, we must just set to work and lift them out of the mire into which they are sunk almost deep enough to strangle them. I



shall go over in the morning to see Jane Harris, and see if she won't take one of the youngest girls. Pretty little creatures, too! John has got to start a subscription paper, and raise money to take them along until they get on their feet again. Oh! shiftless? Of course they are; but I can't let them starve, even if they are."

"Certainly not," said Mr. Percival, much interested. "Did you find out whether any of the family have an interest in Christ?"

"The woman was a member of some church, once, she said; but, oh! she is *so* discouraged with life, poor thing, she doesn't see any good in trying to be *anything*! I think that a visit from you, Arthur, will be just what she needs. If anybody in the world ever stood in need of heavenly counsel, it is certainly she."

"There seems to be more wretchedness in the world than anything else." The words broke from Kate with a miserable little sigh.

"There is a good deal," replied Mrs. Knox, "but I don't know that we estimate our happiness as we should, or we shouldn't mind it so much. For instance, there is that one really poverty-stricken home in Clinton among the very many comfortable ones; just one. After all, Katie, I am inclined to think that we all have ourselves to thank for what life is to us—good or ill, happy or wretched. But I fear that I have just gone and given you the dumps, my dear. You mustn't mind my rattling. We will soon fix up these people, and you shall do your part in teaching the children. There will be as many as half-a-dozen for you and Edna,"



At this moment Mr. Knox came in from the store, and handed Kate a letter and a package.

"I found them in the office as I came along home," said he. "The package is from Oakland, I guess, but the letter seems to have come a good way. As near as I can make out, that is a California postmark."

"It is from Ward, I presume," said Kate, listlessly, slipping the letter under the string of the package until she should go to her room for the night. "We have not been in the habit of corresponding at all, either; I always hear of him through Harold."

Even when she got to her room, she seemed to be in no hurry to open the letter, but laid it on the dresser, and unbound and brushed her hair as usual.

"I suppose that he is well enough," she said, seeming to answer some questioning thought. "I don't see what he has to write to me about particularly. Some of his nonsense, altogether likely. If it is, I shall not have the patience to read it."

She took up a book and looked at the table of contents before she broke the seal. At last she took up the missive and carefully opened the end of the envelope with a pin, and, with an uninterested air, unfolded the two large sheets, written in a large, boyish hand as legible as print. But her eyes had travelled over but a few lines ere her attention became fixed and earnest enough.

Let us take the liberty of reading the letter with her.



"PASADENA, CALIFORNIA, *April 15, 18—*.

"*Dear Kate:* I know you will be altogether astonished at this from *me*, but the truth is, I have got something so sweet and good to tell you that it can't possibly wait. Besides, I think that I ought to tell you instead of commissioning Hal or somebody else to do so. It is just this: your bad brother Ward has 'stepped over the line to Christ.' Are you not glad? But I need not ask the question. Of course you are. How can you help being, when you profess to love *him* and his church? My one deep regret is that I didn't do it years ago. I might have been a happy boy instead of a miserable one; a good one instead of a reckless, and almost a lost, one.

"You see, before I left home, I—well, I don't know that it does any good to rehearse these things—but I got down pretty low in the scale of morals, and something happened to me—something which none of our family were permitted to know about, except one, and God allowed that one to be our stepmother. Kate, I don't know how to write it, but that woman stepped in and saved me, and without being asked. She always had been good to me—much too good—but I never had anything take hold of me like that act of mercy. It was so much the greater because she had it in her power to punish me instead of doing the other thing. I date my very first desire for a Christian life from that act of hers. I really wanted and tried to do better, but it did seem as if I must get away from Oakland and my old associates; and when the opportunity came, I em-



braced it at once. But I have found out that Pasadena is no stranger to evil, and even in Mr. Randal's house I found some of the very things which had been such terrible temptations to me at home.

"I'm sure I don't know what would have become of me if *she* had not held on to me. It seemed as if she was determined to save me, whether or no. She wrote me the loveliest and most loving letters, which I couldn't have answered if I had tried—and I didn't try—and those letters kept me many a time from going to the bad. She gave me a handsome Bible before I left home, too, and got me to promise to try to read it. I did read it a good deal, especially the passages she had marked, and I got to thinking about it, Kate—why I wasn't a Christian, and all that, you know—and finally I just made up my mind to be one, if God would only help me to part with my sins; and he did, and I am just as happy as I can be.

"I want to mention one other thing that our stepmother did for me. She put in my trunk a letter directed to Mr. Austin McVay, a prominent lawyer in Pasadena, and an old friend of hers; and I was to go to him with it and get acquainted. I didn't go for a long time, but when I did, I tell you, it paid me. Through his influence I have begun going to church regularly and to Sabbath-school, too, and have joined the Young People's Society. I am wonderfully interested in the Christian-culture course, and am trying to be an 'all-round' good boy. More than that, Mr. McVay found out that papa designed me for the law, and he has



lent me law-books, and I am reading under his direction. I would like to fulfil papa's wishes now. It grieves me so that I was so obstinate, and now he is so sick, and I am so far away.

"And now, just one word more. I am going to turn over a new leaf as regards our father's wife, and call her 'mother.' I never expected to be willing to do it, but becoming a son of God makes all the difference in the world. I wish, Kate, that you would let all *your* roots of bitterness be destroyed, too, and would agree, with me, to cancel all the past. Let's make all the restitution that we can, and be just the best kind of Christians—the Bible kind.

"Hoping to hear from you soon, I am, as ever, your brother,  
WARD BELMONT."

Kate laid down the letter, took up the little package, and snapped the string. Leisurely tearing off the wrappings which enfolded it, a little box came to light—a dainty affair made of celluloid, lined with blue satin, and tied with azure ribbons. Within the satin bed lay, side by side a row of soft, shining, golden curls. A slip of paper explained it all.

"Brownie is going to school now, so we have put him in trousers and shorn his curls; but mamma says, as he is especially Kate's baby, she must have them. Are they not lovely?

"NELLIE."

That was all; no other words; but at sight of them and of the curls Kate burst into tears.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

### *BROWNIE'S SECRET.*

MEANWHILE, Dr. Belmont still lay in the remorseless grasp of paralysis, getting no better, seemingly getting no worse; showing no change, except that the light of the Spirit grew brighter as the refining influences of suffering worked their will. The Young People's Society proved a never-ending source of comfort to him, and many a sermon did the servant of Christ preach lying there among his pillows; and Mrs. Belmont fell into the habit of sitting by his bedside and taking down the thoughts as they fell from his lips, and sending them to the daily papers, through whose agency they reached the public. These extracts were paid for, and the proceeds were devoted, by the author's earnest request, to the society's relief committee, for distribution among the poor, of which Oakland had a goodly share.

Everything had gone on much the same as usual in the home of the Belmonts. Mrs. Belmont herself worked hard to keep up with expenses, sometimes toiling far into the night; but with the best that she and Harold could do, they could not lay by much for a rainy day. Kate had been as good as her word, and every month had sent sufficient to pay Betty Ann, the hired girl. Ward had sent, from time to time, glowing accounts of his future prospects; but at present board and clothes, etc., swallowed up the major part of his earnings—at



least, they had done so until very lately. Since the letter had come announcing the blessed news of his decision for Christ, there had been some small remittances of two or three, and once even of five, dollars. This, to Mrs. Belmont, who really knew the boy better than any one else did, was a precious promise of good things to come, and helped to lighten the burdens which she lifted with difficulty and carried wearily every day.

Her habitual cheerfulness, however, never departed for one moment; she went about her work singing just as usual, and she never entered the sick-room with anything but a smile upon her lips. It had now been some time since Nellie had been obliged to fold her helpful hands and to make a constant friend of the sitting-room lounge, for Nellie was now wearing away very fast to "the land of the leal." Her cough increased every day, and the shortened breath and sharp, knife-like pains cutting through her lungs spoke only too plainly of the rapid work of the destroyer.

To the neighbors Mrs. Belmont was a continual wonder. Although so heavily burdened with work and with the two sick ones to care for, she never neglected the children. Mamie was manifesting a decided talent for music, and her stepmother found time, being herself an accomplished pianist, to give her lessons. She also kept up Clyde's elocution, and she took care to teach Brownie to read and write. The little fellow would follow her about for an hour at a time with his book, asking questions, for he was not satisfied to read and not under-



stand; and in his eager, innocent mind she embraced the opportunity to plant those seeds of heavenly wisdom which were destined, in time to come, to bring forth fruit an hundred-fold. He was now more than six years old, and had thrown aside his baby ways with his kilts, and had taken on an air of manliness with the putting on of his knee-pants and blouse-waists. His curls, as we have seen, had, with very great regret, been cut off and laid in the satin-lined box which Kate had opened with a burst of tears—a silent and sweet reminder of the baby brother of whom she had, in her way, made an idol.

Brownie had a great ambition in his secret soul. It was to fulfil the high aims, the noble desires, which his stepmother had implanted in his heart; to be the something glorious in education, in the power of goodness, in the influence of daily life, which she had taught him that he could become. To grow up to be some comfort and some solace for what his baby eyes had seen her suffer, and his baby mind had only very partially understood, was his sweet thought day by day. Very childish and undefined these ideas were, of course, but they were *there*, and the child lived them out in his school-life. He had seen the ill-favored glances cast at his dearly-loved stepmother, had heard many unkind remarks thrown out by the Ransoms, and his affectionate little heart rose in honest rebellion at the injustice and untruth of it all. He had never confided these thoughts to any one, not even to Mamie; and they were all the greater and stronger for being kept within the



confines of his own heart; but he had a half-formed wish, which speedily developed into a giant resolution, to stand by his stepmother, and to bring her enemies, some sweet day, to be at peace with her.

With all this burning in his heart, Brownie started to school; with this in view, his lessons were attacked with the air of a conqueror, his recitations given perfectly, every command punctiliously obeyed; and, with a thrill of honest satisfaction, he soon saw his name placed on the roll of honor, while he was spoken of as the "star boy" of his grade.

Was it easy doing all this? Not a bit of it. It was like swimming against the current of a rapid river, for the great majority of the boys at school were free to think and free to live as they pleased, so far as their parents and guardians were concerned. They were addicted to small vices of all sorts, chief among which was a tampering with the truth. Most of them had little or no regard for their word; and our little boy stood aghast at the cunning ways in which they deceived and got the better of teachers and parents, in order to obtain their own way.

Against cigarette-smoking, playing cards or any game for money, and tasting liquor in any form, Mrs. Belmont had faithfully warned all the children. She had made these warnings much more impressive by telling them some very thrilling stories of events which had come under her own observation, and they had sunk very deeply into Brownie's mind—so deeply that often, on his way to school, he would point to some little cigarette-smoker and say impress-



ively to his companions: "There's a boy that will never amount to much; *he smokes*." Or he would frown at a saloon in passing, and shake his head solemnly as he pronounced against it thus: "I'd rather *die* than make money as that man does."

One bright morning the boys of his grade were standing about in the pleasant school-yard taking our boy to task because he had refused to play marbles for "keeps." His intrinsic goodness was laughed at in a manner surprisingly cruel for such small boys, though many of them were far in advance of Brownie in years; and certain sneering allusions to his "mother's apron-strings" were made. Poor Brownie's eyes filled rapidly, but he stood his ground bravely; indeed, he had never thought of giving way for a moment; but their cruel thrusts sorely wounded him, poor little warrior!

"Why don't you be man enough to do as you please?" asked Tommy Ransom. This boy was one of the sons of Mrs. Ransom on Rose street. "Your stepmother ain't no kin to you. She ain't your mother. She's just your pa's wife. I wouldn't have her bossin' me around, if I was you. Mother says she pities you. She says, when Kate took care of you, you used to be lively and full of fun, but now you have to walk the chalk, and you dassen't say your soul's your own. I'd kick about it, if I was you. There's no use in a kid standin' all that. Don't you want some candy? I cheated mother this morning. I told her I had to have a dime for paper and pencil to take to school,



and I didn't; I wanted it for candy. That's the way I bamboozle *her*. Have some?"

"No," said Brownie, firmly, drawing back, with a shocked look on his innocent face.

"What's the reason?" demanded young Ransom. "Don't you like candy?"

"Not that kind," said Brownie, putting his small, dimpled hands behind him out of harm's way, for he dearly loved sweets of all kinds, and nothing could be more tempting to him than the morsel that Tommy held forth.

"What's the matter with it?" asked the boy, with a frown, gazing in surprise at the little fellow. "Here is a winedrop; take that; it'll 'most melt in your mouth. You'll be cryin' for more before you get that half ate."

"I wouldn't touch that for anything in the world!" exclaimed the little boy, moving further away from his tempter. "Mamma says she knew a boy—and his name was Tommy, too—and he got to liking to drink whiskey just from eating brandy-drops and winedrops and such candies; and he got drunk before he got of age; and that's *true*! My mother knew him her very own self."

"Your *mother*!" sneered Tommy, putting the discarded winedrop in his mouth, "she ain't no great shakes. Besides, she ain't your mother, no more than I be. I told you that before."

"She *is* my mother," replied Brownie, his eyes overflowing, "and I *love* her! She don't make me 'walk chalk,' or anything of the kind. Your mother is not her friend. She says wrong things about her—things that are not true. If



I had a good chance, I should like to tell her so."

"You would!" shouted Tommy, looking at Brownie with a kind of comical admiration; "if that's what you want, I'll give you a chance."

True to his word, on the following Saturday, as Brownie was on his way home from up the street, having been on an errand for his mother, Tommy came running out with a request from Mrs. Ransom that he would step in a minute.

"She didn't tell me to call you," said he, as soon as his guest was fairly in the house, "but I was bound to see whether you had the grit to stand up to her as you said you would. Mother!" calling loudly in the direction of the kitchen, "come in here; Brownie Belmont is here, and wants to see you."

Mrs. Ransom came in all floury from making pies.

"Bless his heart!" said she, for she had always dearly loved the little fellow. "You are the greatest stranger, Brownie. I am just as glad to see you as I can be. Will you give me a kiss?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Brownie, readily holding up his red lips.

"Come into the room and sit down, son," said Mrs. Ransom. "How is Kate? When did you hear from her? I expect you miss her awfully, don't you?"

"Very much," said Brownie.

"And you'd rather have her take care of you than your new mamma, would you not?" asked Mrs. Ransom.

Brownie's cheeks were very pink, but his



voice was soft and low. "I would like to have them both," he answered. "I am very fond of them; and—and I don't think you understand my mamma, Mrs. Ransom. She is a lovely lady, and never in the world does things to hurt us, as you say she does; and she teaches us good things about going to heaven when we die. If you would come to see her and get acquainted, you would love her, because you just couldn't help it, she's always so smiley and nice; and—and she thinks that *you're* nice. I heard her say one day that she thought you were a very fine-looking lady."

"She did!" exclaimed Mrs. Ransom, with a constrained air. "I am sure I am very much obliged to her. What was it, dear, that you wanted to see me about?"

"Why, just *that*," said Brownie, with downcast eyes. "I wanted to beg you please not to say any more ugly things about my mamma, because they are not a mite true, and she's good, and so are Nellie and Clyde; and Nellie's going to heaven before long, and we shan't see her any more, and we love her so much; and—and—oh! I do so want you to be her friend, Mrs. Ransom." And the little fellow took out his handkerchief and wiped his streaming eyes.

"Now, don't cry," said Mrs. Ransom, much troubled. "I've been making lemon custards; wouldn't you like to take one to your mamma?"

"Oh! so much, thank you!" replied the boy, eagerly, through the glistening tear-drops. "She is very much obliged to you—that is, I know she will be. She loves lemon custards."

Mrs. Ransom wrapped up the pie in a dainty



linen napkin, saying. "There; you can bring back the plate another day, and make me another visit. I shall love to see you any time."

With a second kiss, Brownie took the pie, and started off with a triumphant air, and Mrs. Ransom stood in the door watching him, with a new, warm feeling in her heart, and a dim consciousness that perhaps she had misjudged Mrs. Belmont; while Tommy, much delighted, turned a somersault in the hall behind her back.



## CHAPTER XXX.

### *BROWNIE'S SECRET—CONTINUED.*

BROWNIE went softly in at the back door, and set the pie on the kitchen table. It was a lovely pie, beautifully scalloped all around the edges, and with a most beautiful meringue all over the top.

"It's a present for mamma, Betty Ann," said he, proudly, "from Mrs. Ransom. Tommy called me in as I was coming by and she gave me this. Isn't it a fine one?"

Betty Ann looked at it in a careless, off-hand manner, then tossed her head scornfully.

"It's no finer than other folkses' pies, as I see," said she. "If I was your ma, I'd be scared about eating Miss Ransom's pies; there might be p'ison in 'em."

Brownie's eyes turned upon her reproachfully.

"Why, Betty Ann," said he, "Mrs. Ransom wouldn't do anything to hurt mamma for anything."

"I don't know that," said Betty Ann, pursing up her lips in a very knowing way.

"Well, I don't believe she would," said the wee man, stoutly, with a very wise look. "Mrs. Ransom isn't such a bad woman, Betty Ann; she's just kind of *queer*. She was real glad to see me to-day, and asked me would I give her a kiss; and I was real glad to do it, too, because, you know, she is a great friend of Kate's."



I don't think you ought to make up your mind so quick about people, Betty Ann."

"I know what I knows," replied Betty Ann, with another toss of her head, and a very hard thump of the iron with which she was smoothing Clyde's Sunday shirt. "If folks says I'm blind, they hain't got no eyes themselves, that's all; and I don't have to be told by nobody livin' that Kate's friends ain't your ma's friends, and ain't like to be. There!"

"I think, Betty Ann," said Brownie, "that if Kate's friends just knew my mother, they would love her just as well as they do Kate. You ve got to *know* folks to like them, don't you know? I didn't like her myself till I knew her, did I?"

To his great astonishment and disgust, Betty Ann threw back her head and laughed—actually laughed aloud.

The boy drew himself up with considerable dignity.

"Anyway, Betty Ann," said he, "you may leave the pie on the table, if you please, for mamma to see when she comes in. I am to carry back the plate and napkin, and I shall ask mamma if I may take Mrs. Ransom a cluster of our new geraniums. I saw Miss Bush sitting at the sewing-machine in the back room, and I bowed to her, and she bowed back and smiled, *kind of*. She's one of Kate's friends, too; but I guess she'd like to be ours, if she was asked. Of course, Betty Ann, you needn't think that anybody'd want to be a friend if they wasn't wanted to."

With which parting thrust, the small man left the kitchen in search of his mother.



Betty Ann laughed again, and wiped her eyes.

"Tain't none of my business, of course," she said to herself, "but if I was Miss Belmont, I wouldn't want no Ransoms nor Bushes a hangin' round me, after all they've said and done to haul her over the coals. I'd like to know what that young one has got into his head. Somethin' or 'nother, you may be sure. I reckon they've been snoopin' round him to find out a lot, so they can go and tattle all over creation. I hope to goodness they ain't goin' to make no more trouble for Miss Belmont. It's my opinion she's had more'n her share a'ready." And Betty Ann shook out one of Mamie's calico dresses and arranged it upon the ironing-board with considerable energy.

Brownie, meanwhile, went into [the sewing-room with the news.

"It's a beautiful pie, mamma," said he, "and Mrs. Ransom was very kind. I think that she would have liked to send her love with it—I *think* she would; she looked like it—if she had known, you see, that you would be glad of it. Would you have been glad of it, mamma?"

"Certainly, my dear. Why should I not?" asked his mother, lifting one of his dimpled hands to her lips.

"Because," said Brownie, reluctantly, "you know she has said ugly, untrue things about you, and—but I don't think she has understood you, mamma, or she would not; and—and I told her you thought her a very fine-looking lady, mamma, and she smiled and said she was much obliged to you, and then she gave me the



pie right away; and I know she was very much pleased, for her eyes shone just like yours when you almost cry."

Mamma stopped her sewing once more, and, taking the boy's sweet face between her hands, kissed it lovingly.

"My darling is a little peacemaker," she said.

"May I take her a bunch of our new geraniums, mamma, when I take back the plate and napkin?" he asked. "I looked all around the room, and I never saw a single plant."

"Instead of a bunch, you may take a little pot of them, dearest," answered Mrs. Belmont. "May he not, Nellie?"

"Of course he may," said Nellie, from among her pillows. "Poor Mrs. Ransom! I have been told that she works so hard, and that her boys are such a trial to her. I wish Lucy could be induced to be friendly with me."

"Oh! yes; and may I—would you care, mamma, if I asked her to come to our Young People's Society and bring the boys? It seems as if it might be a good thing," said Brownie.

"I should be delighted to have her come, and so would papa. Tell her so, my son. And now let us go and see that wonderful pie," said Mrs. Belmont.

"You may tell Mrs. Ransom for me, Brownie, dear," said she, as she slipped the pie upon another plate, "that she has given me a great treat. This is the first lemon pie that I have seen this spring, and I am very fond of it; in fact, a lemon pie is my favorite dainty. And, darling, you may give Mrs. Ransom my *love*."

"Oh! thank you, thank you, dear mamma!"



said the delighted little boy, as she put the pie-plate and napkin in a basket, and wrapped a paper around the pot of geranium. Then he marched off upon his errand, in high spirits.

He trudged along the street with a light and merry heart. His secret was working out most beautifully. He smiled pleasantly to himself, and repeated one of his Sunday verses; indeed, that very verse was the beginning of his secret: "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." His mother's ways did please the Lord—he was quite sure of that—and her enemies must come to be at peace with her. She had called him "a peacemaker." What a blessed, happy thing if he might be the instrument in God's hand for healing all the dreadful past. This, in simple, childish fashion, ran swiftly through the boy's mind. Dear child! he did not know how even his unconscious little shining curls had spoken loudly in behalf of peace.

Up the stone steps went little Brownie, and ting-a-ling-ling went the hall-bell. Mrs. Ransom was getting supper, so she sent Tommy to open the door. At sight of the small visitor, he turned round and shouted to his mother: "Ma, it's Brownie Belmont come back with the plate and napkin, and something wrapped up in a paper; looks like a flower. Come right in here and see."

"Well, I never!" exclaimed that lady, hurrying in, followed by Lucy and Miss Bush. "Back already? You needn't have minded to return them so soon, sonny. Here, Tom, take



this pie-plate and napkin in the dining-room. What do you say, child? This beautiful, rare geranium for *me*? Lucy has been trying for ever so long to get a slip of that, but we could not find one anywhere. Where did you get it, deary?"

"One of mamma's friends in Dayton sent it to her, and this one Nellie started herself," said Brownie.

"You don't say that your ma sent it to me?" inquired Mrs. Ransom.

"Yes'm," said Brownie, who had pulled off his cap and tucked it under his arm when he first came in; "and she sent thanks for the pie, and liked it best of all things; and, Mrs. Ransom, she sent her *love*."

Mrs. Ransom's face had a queer look, and Sarah Bush might have been seen to smile grimly, but Lucy went into ecstasies over the pretty plant.

"It's the loveliest thing I ever saw," said she. "You always have such lovely plants; your bay-window is full of them; and we haven't one."

"Come over and get some," said Brownie, generously. "I know mamma and Nellie will be glad to give you all you want."

"That's too good to last," said Miss Sarah, gruffly; but she put her nose to the flower, nevertheless, and laid a needle-pricked finger on the velvety petals.

"You must tell your folks that I am much obliged for their kindness," said Mrs. Ransom.

"Yes'm," said Brownie.

"Your father doesn't get any better, I reckon?" said Miss Bush.



"No'm," responded Brownie,

"'Tisn't likely he gets any too much care, with her sewing to support the family. She gets more than she can do, doesn't she?" inquired Miss Bush.

"She is very busy, and she works some nights," replied Brownie.

"And her girl is dying with consumption, I understand," continued Miss Bush.

Brownie nodded, while his lips quivered.

Then he stood up very straight, and spoke out bravely: "Won't you all please come to our Young People's Society, and bring the boys? It is every Sunday afternoon at three o'clock, in papa's room. He would like you to come so much."

"Um!" replied Miss Sarah, "I don't know about that. There's a heap of endeavoring in the world, in my opinion, and mighty little done. But I don't suppose it would kill us; and I would kind of like to see the old pastor. I haven't seen him since he was first taken."

"If Aunt Sarah comes, mother and I will, Brownie," said Lucy, giving the child a kiss. "Must you go so soon? Why not stay a while?"

"No'm, I have to go," said the little boy.

"Well, see here," said Miss Sarah, as the boy stepped out of the open door, "I don't know that I'd mind stepping round and giving your stepmother a lift with her sewing. I haven't much on my hands now, and I feel lost without I'm using a needle or a machine. You tell her, and let me know. Tommy, you run along home with him. He's a little fellow, and might be afraid by himself."



But Brownie was not at all afraid. He went flying home, his heart singing all the way this one sweet strain: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."



## CHAPTER XXXI.

### *UNCLE RICHARD BARNES.*

IT was a lovely day in early May. The sunshine fell in floods of golden glory on hill-tops and valleys; the breath of the spring flowers floated in at the open window, and the glad song of the birds called off Mrs. Belmont from her cutting-table to sympathize for a little while with all the beautiful new life in the outside world. How glorious it all was! How she longed to take a drive away from the busy little city, out into the sweet, quiet country, where nature reigned in sweet serenity. A bit of a sigh struggled up from the depths of her heart as she gazed. Nellie's cough smote upon her ear painfully. How constant it was growing! How thin the pale face became as the days went by! The sigh which had struggled out of her overcharged heart burst from her lips as she turned away from the window; but almost immediately her voice rose with the hymn:

“All, yes, all, I give to Jesus;  
It belongs to him;  
All my love I give to Jesus;  
It belongs to him;  
Loving him for love unceasing,  
For his mercy e'er increasing,  
For his watch-care never ceasing;  
It belongs to him.”

“Mamma,” said Nellie, from her couch, “I am so glad you feel that way. I know that it comes from your heart, and that you feel that I, your own dear little daughter, belong to



Jesus. You know, and I know, dear mamma, that I shall not be able to stay with you much longer. I am nearing the end of my journey very fast now. I can see that the doctor is not able—indeed, he does not pretend to be—to lengthen out my life. But you know how tired I am, and how glad I am to go.”

Her mother came over to the lounge, and, kneeling down beside the frail form, gathered it in her arms.

“My dear, my afflicted child,” she murmured, in a broken voice, “you have had a suffering life, and mother is glad you are going home. Jesus always knows best. Lonely as I shall be without you, desolate as the house will seem, I am truly glad to have you go. How could I be otherwise when I know what I do of the joys he has prepared for those who love him? Yes, my dear, I believe that I can say from my heart, ‘All, yes, all, I give to Jesus.’”

“You have had so much to try you, mamma,” said Nellie, resting her thin hand on her mother’s bowed head; “such crushing sorrows; and there is little else ahead of you, papa being so hopelessly sick, and all; and yet you do not break under it. You even seem to grow stronger and more soulful. I know that, when I am gone, you will still think of me, not as dead and buried, but as living and happy in my home beyond the stars. You will still go on doing your duty and trusting God just the same. Oh! I hope, mamma, that Jesus will let me help you in some sweet, mysterious way. It may be that I shall be with you just as much as I am now.”



"God grant it, darling," said the mother, rising from her knees. "But you are talking too much, and irritating those lungs. There is Harold coming from the store, too. I must go and see what he wants."

Harold held up a letter as he stepped into the hall, and, in a kind of glad excitement, threw his arm around her and gave her a kiss.

"Can my father bear some good news?" he asked, under his breath. "I have a letter from Uncle Richard."

"And who is Uncle Richard?" inquired Mrs. Belmont. "I do not remember to have heard of such a gentleman."

"He is not our real uncle," replied Harold, taking off his hat and hanging it up carefully in the hall; "he is simply a kind of an adopted brother of my mother's. My grandfather took him when he was a little fellow and reared him, and, when he was still comparatively a young man, he went to Australia. He was ever so much older than my mother. We used to hear from him, while grandpa lived, once in a while, but for years now he has been as silent as the grave. He is very eccentric. He has come back to the United States, now, possessed of quite a fortune, is a bachelor still, and has settled in Chicago. Do you think it will be safe to read the letter to father? There is something in it I would like to talk to him about, if I can."

"If it is good news, I cannot see that it will hurt him," said Mrs. Belmont. "On the contrary, it may do him good. I have been trying to let some of the beautiful spring sunshine



into his room, and I think that he has enjoyed it immensely. The birds, too, have been coming and perching upon his window-sill, to his great amusement, just as if they had news for him. Perhaps they were trying to unfold the contents of your letter."

Harold laughed lightly as he followed his stepmother into the sick-room. It was a very pretty room. Mrs. Belmont had taken special pains to beautify it; to bring into it everything which could interest and entertain a sick person. The patient looked up and smiled as Harold came in.

"Ah! Harry, said he, "it is an unheard-of treat to see you at this time of the day. What good thing brings you home just now. Your face is as sunny as all out-of-doors."

"It is a glorious day," said Harold, drawing his chair up close to the bed and clasping his father's hand; "the air is full of new life. I feel full to the brim with energy. I have a letter, father, from an old friend."

"Indeed! Will you—are you intending to read it to me?" inquired the sick man, with a pleased smile.

"Mother thought that I might," said Harold, carefully. "It is from one whom we have not heard from for years—Uncle Richard, father."

"Uncle Richard!" exclaimed Dr. Belmont, in surprise. "I never expected to hear from him again. It must be as much as eight or ten years since we have heard anything from him. Read it, by all means, Harry."

Thus encouraged, Harold opened and read the following:



“602 MICHIGAN AVENUE, CHICAGO, ILL., *May 2, 18—*.

“DEAR NEPHEW HAROLD: You’ll doubtless be immensely surprised to hear from the old wanderer, Uncle Richard Barnes, again; but it’s the truth that ‘a bad penny will return,’ in my case, at least. I haven’t seen a sick day since I left you. I venture I’m a good deal like old ‘Joe Bagstock,’ ‘rough and tough,’ and don’t wear out easy. I came home from Australia about two or three months ago, and have taken a house in Chicago, and have settled down to try to live the rest of my days in some kind of peace and comfort. I suppose you will think it strange that I don’t come and see you; but, to tell the truth, I can’t do it. I heard of your mother’s death and your father’s affliction from Martha’s folks, where I stopped a day or two, and I couldn’t bear to come back to Oakland under the circumstances. I never go to see sick folks. I’d about as lief see a ghost.

“I’ve got some money, and I came here because I thought it was a good place to invest it. I made it all by hard work in Australia. I’m in for enjoying the remnant of my life, now, and have bought a gimcrack sort of a house, and filled it up with everything except somebody to keep me company. Now I’m coming to the point.

“You remember, when you were a little fellow—or maybe you don’t—you used to talk about being a minister? Well, I always thought, if you were going to make half as good a one as your father, you ought to have a chance. Now, I’d like to know if you are of the same mind still; and if you are, come on,



and I'll give you the best kind of an education, scot-free, just for your company about the house. I am not in the habit of throwing my money away, and I don't like anybody dictating to me how to spend it; but I take a notion to do this for your mother's son, and I'm not the one to go back on my word.

"Let me know your sentiments as soon as possible; and if you consent to the arrangements, I'll send a check for the expenses of your journey. Clothes, books, and *expectations* are all thrown in with the education, of course. My regards to your esteemed father and the rest. Let me hear from you by return mail.

"The same old stick,      RICHARD BARNES."

"A characteristic letter, surely," said the Doctor, from among his pillows, "and an exceedingly generous one. Poor old Dick! It was always a wonder for him to give anything away. He must have taken more notice of you, Harry, than any one ever knew. To think that he has, in a sense, been carrying you round in his heart all these years! 'Expectations,' too! It would be funny if the queer old fellow should take a notion to make you his heir, wouldn't it?"

"It's a splendid chance for me to carry out my dreams," said Harold, with a little sigh; "but, of course, it is not to be thought of for one moment. I just wanted you to know how pleasant it is for Uncle Dick to remember me so kindly. If I was situated so that I could take advantage of it, nothing could be more complete. Everything furnished; I would not



have even to think about finances, but could sail ahead on a smooth sea. Ah, well! it's all right, isn't it, little mother?"

Mrs. Belmont did not answer. She was pondering deeply over something. But the father spoke up tremulously: "Oh! my son, if we could only arrange some way to do without you! It seems to be the hand of the Lord; but we must wait for the open door. He will show us one if he wants us to enter into this arrangement."

"It isn't best to think of it at all," said Harold, brightly. "I could not and would not leave you, of course. You need my labor. I can probably serve God as well in the store as in the pulpit. But it is very kind of Uncle Richard—very."

Mrs. Belmont still sat wrapped in thought. Nellie had a little money of her own, a bit of an inheritance from her father; just a few hundred dollars, it is true; but it would help materially in tiding them over a crisis, if such a thing should ensue. Nellie would never need it now; indeed, she had urged her mother again and again to make use of it; but Mrs. Belmont had always refused, meaning never to touch it except in case of absolute necessity. There was a little struggle in her heart, but she spoke up bravely: "I think we must make it possible for you to go, Harry. I have a little sum in reserve to lean on; my trade is yielding good returns, especially since Miss Sarah Bush has lent us a hand now and then; we can economize somewhat more; and I feel as if we shall be able to manage it. Don't look as if you



were being accused of robbery! I will consider the money invested in living expenses as loaned to you, if you will. But you must go; so answer Uncle Richard at once, and say 'yes.' ”

Of course the father and Harold both expostulated, reasoned, and even refused to accept what they knew must prove a sacrifice. But Mrs. Belmont remained firm, and set before them the grave necessity for Harold's making use of his gifts; reminded them that he had long felt that the Lord was calling him to the work, and that she believed this to be the “open door” of opportunity; that to obtain a good education was to be fitted for one's life-work; and that, this once obtained, he would be in a position to help them far more than at present.

Thus urged, they finally yielded, not without many expressions of regret, some indignant protests, and even some grateful, heart-felt tears.



## CHAPTER XXXII.

### WARD COMES TO THE FRONT.

ONCE decided upon going to Chicago, preparations for Harold's departure went on speedily. Mr. Belmont was as happy as a child over the future prospects of his eldest son, and gave him many words of counsel in regard to his course of study and his preparation for the ministry.

"I want you to *speck* for Jesus at every opportunity. There is so much good you can do in a city like Chicago, my son. Above all things, don't neglect the word. That is one of the temptations of the present age. Make that your study beyond any other textbook. Fill your heart full of it. It will not only keep you in the hour of temptation, but it will be like a lamp shining from within and leading those with whom you communicate to Jesus. Never be 'ashamed of the testimony of the Lord,' and be willing to be a 'partaker of the afflictions of the gospel.' Look forward to battle scenes. They will come. The enemy will be sure to be on hand with the powers of darkness. He never fails to do so. Therefore, expect to 'endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ,' and 'study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.' And now, my beloved son, God in heaven bless and keep you. He



has called you to a holy calling. May he go with you every step of the way. I feel, Harold, that I shall not be here long. I am nearing the 'swelling of Jordan,' and I cannot tell you how happy I am to see the fulfillment of my hopes concerning you at hand. There has been a minister in our family for five generations—always the eldest son, and I do not want to be the first to fail in having one to give to the Lord."

Before Harold went away, he made a parting visit to Clinton. He did not ask or expect a great deal of sympathy from Kate, but from Mrs. Knox and Miss Richie he received all that his heart could wish.

"It is what I call a golden opportunity," said Mrs. Knox, "and I hope the old bachelor uncle will open his heart still further and send some of his Australian gold to your self-sacrificing step-mother. She has shown what kind of metal she is made of, I think; and the only dark spot about it is, that your going will leave her in a bad fix financially. I can't see, for the life of me, Harold, how she is to get along without your help."

"I don't either," murmured Harold; "but she insists, and I don't know hardly how to refuse. I confess it looks extremely selfish in me, and yet it seems the only thing to do."

Miss Richie spent the evening at Mrs. Knox's, and they had one of their song treats for the last time for years—it might be forever.

When it was over, Harold walked home with Edna, and in the course of the walk asked her to correspond with him.



"I ask it, Miss Richie," said he, "because I believe it will be a help to me, and a stimulus and encouragement to my work. My sister—you must have noticed that—is not exactly in sympathy with me in these things. Not, of course, but what she wishes me well, and would do all she could to help me, but she lacks the something that I especially need, and that I have always found in you. Am I asking too much?"

"I fear you are expecting too much," returned Edna. "I think, doubtless, you are overrating my capabilities. But however that may be, I shall be only too glad to do anything to help you to reach a successful issue. I can heartily sympathize with you, at least, and I am so glad for your father's sake as well as your own that you are able at last to prepare for what you have so long felt to be your life-work."

"I understood from sister Kate some time ago," said Harold, that your own heart is reaching out toward the foreign field—that you have a desire to become a missionary. Is this correct, or is it supposition on her part?"

He felt the hand upon his arm tremble a little, but the voice which answered him was clear and steadfast. "I confess to having had such dreams," she said. "As a child I was a universal reader, and some works concerning the lives and labors of some of our prominent missionaries fell into my hands, and I read them with avidity. I remember my heart was very much stirred over them. The memory followed me and became a part of my life.



There was a time when I thought that I must prepare to go—that it was the only thing to do—but the way hedged up, and at present it is but a dream. I can say, however, that the thought is still a very pleasant one.”

“Has your mind been directed to any one point in the foreign field,” asked Harold, much interested, “or is your interest merely general?”

“I think that China has been the place of my dreams,” she answered; “at least, I find myself more interested in the Chinese than in any other people; but perhaps it is because I have personal friends among the missionaries there.”

“I am glad to know that you have thought of undertaking the Lord’s work in this way,” said Harold, as he parted with her at the door of her boarding-place. “It serves to strengthen the links of the friendship which binds us, and brings us to a more perfect mutual sympathy. Good-bye, and ‘May God be with us till we meet again.’” The next moment he was gone.

There was a letter from Ward when Harold reached home. It was written to the whole family, and was a breezy affair, full of the “wine of new life.” With shining eyes, Mrs. Belmont held up to Harold’s astonished gaze a slip of thin blue paper.

“Another check!” he exclaimed, taking it in his hand, “and for fifteen dollars! Hurrah for Ward! He’s coming to the front. If he keeps this up, you will have no difficulty in getting along in number-one style.”

“He assures us that he can and will,” said she, eagerly. “He says that, now that he does not go to places which cost money, he will be



able to help us considerably. Oh! Harry, it seems as if the Lord is answering our prayers for Ward by opening the very windows of heaven. My heart isn't big enough to receive the blessing."

Meanwhile, Ward, in his far-off home in California, is trying to make the best of life in the best and wisest sense, and to be the "fall-round" good boy he had written of his determination to be in his letter to Kate. We will spend one Sunday with him. No one in Mr. Randall's house stirs until nine o'clock or later on Sunday mornings. His only child, Miss Meta, has never been in the habit of going to Sunday-school; and she and her mother generally pass by the eleven o'clock service, as they have not enough energy, after the late breakfast, to get ready; so, unless Mr. Randall takes a notion to attend, there is no church-going until evening. Ward did not use to go, either. After being out late Saturday night at some place of entertainment, it was unusually refreshing to lie in bed Sunday morning and sleep as long as he wanted to; and Ward fell into the habit only too easily. But after he had forsaken self for Christ, everything changed with him. He grew to fairly hate the lying in bed on Sunday mornings, and contracted the habit of getting his own breakfast—for he was so much one of the family as to be allowed the privilege of going about the house as he liked—and going to Sunday-school and to church. Mr. Randall laughed at him, and Meta pouted over what she was pleased to style the "absurd nonsense" of his actions; but one good thing about Ward



was this: when he determined to do a good thing, he was not to be ridiculed out of it. So we see him this morning singing gaily about the kitchen, as he makes his coffee and boils his eggs, while all the others in the house are fast asleep. It was a little earlier than usual this morning, too; for Ward has some business on hand for his Father in heaven before he goes to Sunday-school. There is a young man on one of the back streets in whom he is interested. He had formed the young man's acquaintance in a rather strange way. He had gone up the street for something, just the night before, and had seen this very young man gazing hungrily at a sign over a saloon-door:

“ABSOLUTELY FREE LUNCHES SERVED HERE

AT ALL HOURS.

STEP IN AND TRY US.”

The young man was poor, as evidenced by his shabby clothes, and was disheartened and discouraged-looking, and Ward understood just how much he longed for that lunch for which he need not pay. But Ward knew, too, what a terrible serpent lay coiled behind the “free lunch,” and, filled with alarm for the stranger, he stepped up and tapped him lightly on the shoulder.

“Don't go in there,” said he, very earnestly. “Come with me, and I'll show you a better place.”

“But it's free, you see,” said the misguided young man, who was evidently not long from



the country, "and I'm desperate hungry, and not a cent in my pocket."

"I'll agree to furnish you a respectable meal if you'll come with me, and it shall cost you nothing," replied Ward; and, linking his arm within that of his new acquaintance, he led him to a respectable restaurant and saw him well provided for.

"You're the best fellow that I've seen in this town, by a long shot," said the stranger, when, his hunger appeased, he sat gazing in surprise at his benefactor. "I've walked everywhere since I came here, and you're the first kind person I've seen."

"I am glad to do you a favor," said Ward, "but I am going to ask one in return, and that is, that you will go to Sunday-school and to church with me to-morrow. I suppose you are one of the many young men about town who are seeking work and finding none. I am on a committee of our church to look out for just those very fellows. Will you tell me where you are to be found, so that I can look you up in the morning?"

The young man mentioned a lodging-house in a questionable part of the city, and Ward parted with him, assuring him that he would call for him in the morning; and this was why Ward had risen a half-hour earlier than usual.

A quarter past eight finds him all ready; and, with his Bible in his hand, he kneels in his room for a moment to ask God's help in rescuing this soul from the death-traps of the city. Then he goes forth on his mission, and nine o'clock finds him in his place in Sunday-school,



with the shabby stranger beside him. As soon as an opportunity offers, he seeks out Mr. McVay, and lays the case before him. Cannot something be done for this aimless lad—something in which Ward can help? Mr. McVay thinks that there can be. He will see that something definite is arranged to-morrow whereby the boy may find employment. Can Ward take care of him to-day? Ward can and does, with another meal at the restaurant persuading him to attend the Young Men's Christian Association in the afternoon; and when he parts with him for a quiet hour or so of reading in his own room before he goes to the Young People's Meeting, it is with the understanding that he is the young man's friend, and means to help him on still further in the good way.

Evening comes. It is the monthly meeting in the Young People's Society, and Ward has a paper on our missions in China. He was never so interested in his life before. He has gathered his items of information with wisdom, and made his selections with the greatest care; and he feels as if he could plead the cause of the Chinese all night. His heart is still full of it when Dr. Preston rises in the pulpit to deliver his evening discourse. The Scripture read is the parable of the ten virgins, and the subject of the Doctor's discourse is "Waiting for the Bridegroom." It is impressive, scholarly, and eloquent. As he concludes, the Doctor requests the members of the congregation to do some work for Christ then and there.

"I feel impressed with the belief," says he, "that there are souls here waiting to be spoken



to on the subject of religion, and that the Spirit is struggling with his witnesses. Will not every one who is conscious of being a Christian ask his right-hand neighbor to enlist in Christ's service? While we stand and sing, or at the close of the song, speak 'Just a word for Jesus.' "

Ward looks toward his right hand as he rises, and sees by his side an elegant young man, a perfect stranger. Offering him a share of his hymn-book, Ward whispers: "Are *you* waiting for the Bridegroom?"

The young man bends upon him a pair of very intellectual eyes, and whispers back: "Thank you, I am not. Will you pray for me?"

Ward goes home with his heart full of song, and finds a discontented Meta in the parlor.

"Such a dry old sermon as we had!" she complains; "all about opportunities and the like! I never see any chance of helping other folks, if I wanted to. What are ministers for, if they must shove their work off upon other folks?"

"No opportunities!" says Ward, as he lays his tired head on his pillow; "and the day has been just as full of them to me as it could be."



## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### *KATE'S DECISION.*

WHEN Kate's eyes first fell on the little row of shining, golden curls lying in their blue satin bed, a perfect rush of emotions mastered her for the time, and, as I said, she burst into a flood of tears. As her heart melted within her and yearned over the pretty tresses, all that was good within her urged her to a speedy reconciliation with those she had injured. But it was very hard for Kate to do right—harder than for many others. She was no moral heroine. I am not sure that she would not have found it easier to undergo a surgical operation than to bring herself to acknowledge that she had been in the wrong, and entreat forgiveness. Still, she even went so far as to gather pen, ink and paper together for the purpose of writing to them all that was in her heart; but after several unsatisfactory attempts, she replaced them in her desk, murmuring in her thought that she was not in a fit state to write; her nerves were all unstrung; a good night's rest would make her all right, and then she would put it off no longer. But the morning brought many unforeseen duties to light, and the whole day passed by without a single opportunity to write the intended letter. With the evening there came company. Then she determined that the very next Saturday she would go home and settle everything properly.



It would be much better to have it out face to face after all; but when Saturday arrived, she found she was no nearer it than before. So, with one excuse and another, several weeks slipped away, and still there remained the unconfessed fault, the heavy heart, and the old unrest.

Mr. Percival had never said anything to her but once, and that was not long after their talk together on the subject. They were alone in the parlor. It was Saturday evening. He said: "I called on your dear father as I came up, Kate. He sent word that he was longing to see you. Perhaps it may be imaginary on my part; but he looks so ethereal; all earthliness has fled away, and I thought if there was anything you wished to do to make him happy, anything special you want to say to him, you would better not delay. Sometimes God doesn't let us have more than one opportunity to set things right.

He had walked away from her then without saying another word, and had entered into a brisk conversation with his host and hostess as to the feasibility of introducing a plan in the church for some direct temperance work, for even little Clinton had its saloon.

It was another Saturday evening, some little time after Harold's departure for Chicago. They had had a very pleasant day. Mrs. Carrolton had invited them to a dinner-party, and with the evening came Arthur. They were all gathered in the parlor with the exception of Mr. Knox, who had not yet come in from the store, and were discussing all the little happen-



ings which had occurred in their daily lives since they last met, and Mr. Percival was just telling Kate that he had seen her father on his way up, and had found him unusually cheerful and happy, when the door opened suddenly, and Hetty appeared with a frightened face. She approached Mrs. Knox at once and spoke in a low tone: "If you please, ma'am, will you come out in the dining-room just a minute? There is someone there waiting to speak to you."

Mrs. Knox rose immediately and excused herself. "I don't really think it is necessary," she said, laughing lightly, "for you are such good friends I don't flatter myself that I shall be missed." Tripping out to the dining-room, she looked round for the "someone" whom Hetty had in waiting, but, to her surprise, she saw no one but her husband.

"John—you!" she exclaimed. "It cannot be you who wanted to see me?"

"Yes, Fanny, it is I, and no one else."

"Why, what do you mean by all this? Why didn't you come right into the parlor and speak up like a man? You act as secret as if you had a whole world of mysteries hidden away in your pockets. I have almost a notion to be a little provoked at you."

"Hush!" said Mr. Knox. "I couldn't speak before Kate. Something has happened."

"O John! It isn't her father? Don't tell me that there is anything fatal. He isn't dead!"

Mr. Knox bowed his head in sad assent. "He had a second stroke just about dark, and died at eight o'clock. I received a telegram,



begging me to break it gently to Kate. I can't do it, Fanny. You will have to."

But the tender-hearted little woman wrung her hands pitifully. "O John! I cannot." Then, after a moment of desperate thought, she said, promptly, "Let Arthur do it. He'll know how better than either of us, of course. Call him out and tell him, and I'll go and fix things so she can get off on the eleven o'clock train. It is ten, now. For pity's sake hurry, John. Hetty will run over to Spencer's and have Jim come over and help you hitch up to the carriage. It's too far to the station for her to try to walk. Don't stop another minute," and away she flew upstairs.

Arthur was accordingly summoned hurriedly from the parlor, and Kate sat wondering and waiting, and gazing out into the white moonlight, with her head thrown back on the headrest of her chair. Her back was toward the door, so that she did not see him when he returned and walked up softly behind her chair. In fact, she was not aware of his presence until he repeated softly and with marvellous sweetness: "'Watch, therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.' We know so well, though, Katie, that to him 'to live was Christ, and to die was gain.'"

With a startled look Kate turned and saw him. "How you frightened me," she said. "What do you mean by those dreadful words?"

"Are they dreadful words?" he asked, covering one of her hands with his as it lay on the arm of the chair. "Is it dreadful for Jesus to come for his waiting servants? Dreadful to go



home with him to that world of light where sorrow, sickness, pain nor death can never come? O Kate, they are beautiful words to me."

"There is something back of all this," she said, trembling from head to foot. "Why did they call you from the room? Where is Mrs. Knox? What has happened?"

"Only the very same thing which is happening every day in this changing world of ours," he replied, very gently. "Another soul has been given wings and set at liberty. Another dear one has passed away into the great beyond. The Lord has come in an hour when we looked not for him, and has called one of his friends home. I am so glad he is at rest, Kate."

"Who?" demanded the girl, springing to her feet, and gazing into his face with wild eyes. "You need not tell me now, I know."

"Listen quietly, then," said he, still keeping the hand he had taken in his firm, warm clasp. "Katie, the dear father passed away very suddenly this evening. He had a second stroke and only lived an hour. Do not do that!" as she uttered a piercing scream and snatched away the hand he held. "You must not cry out in that way, my dear girl. You must be calm in order to act. And the blow is such a merciful one. There was no release from that bed of pain in any other way. He was so glad to go. He has been patiently awaiting his call heavenward for such a long, weary time. It was such glorious gain for him to die."

"Don't talk to me like that!" she cried, passionately. "A merciful blow! Oh! it has



killed me! He told me that I had a hard heart, and I meant to let him know that it had softened toward him, and now I never can. I meant to tell him all very soon. I was going home to show them all that I was sorry, and I meant to do everything to make them forgive me, and now it is too late! Oh! why did I put it off? I thought once that I would go to-day, but I stayed for the dinner-party. Oh! to think that he can never know how really full of affection my heart was for him; how it has longed to make restitution for all the sad days and sleepless nights it has caused him. Oh! Mr. Percival, God has punished me so severely."

"He has tempered justice with mercy, my dear Kate. The others whom you have wronged are still living. You can carry your repentant heart home to them. Shall you go at once? There is a train goes at eleven. Mrs. Knox has thoughtfully gone to arrange what she thinks will be necessary for your journey, and I will beg a leave of absence and go with you."

"You are too kind," said Kate, preparing to leave the room. "I don't know how to thank you properly for standing by me in this, my second special time of trouble. But what I want to say is this: whether you go with me or not, whether there is anyone to stand by me, I am determined to do right at last if God will help me. I will go and tell her all that has been struggling for utterance these many months, and if she can forgive me, well. If not, I will learn to bear it as best I can, and own the punishment a just one."

'You cannot doubt her readiness to forgive?'



said Mr. Percival, coming close to her side and speaking with the intense earnestness habitual to him. "My dear sister, she will meet you more than half-way. You don't know her. She is one of those blessed Christians whose very presence is a benediction. But I must not detain you another moment. You have but twenty minutes to get ready. Try to be as calm and trustful as you can. I will ask Mr. Knox to excuse me to my congregation to-morrow, and will be ready to attend you. Don't thank me," as she tried once more to show how grateful she was. "You must know that I must be there when he is laid away," and opening the door for her, he watched her pass out with a satisfied look on his good face.

"That is as it should be," he said, as he closed the door on her retreating foot-steps. "Kate has been a wayward child of our Father, but I believe she is a child. And she has had a lesson that will probably endure her lifetime."

A short time after they were speeding onward towards Oakland. Kate drew her veil closely over her sad face, and shrank back in the corner of her seat unable to carry on even the semblance of a conversation; and Mr. Percival, kindly mindful of her, only watched for an opportunity to render her some service. About half-way they were stopped at a little station by a telegram that there was a wreck ahead, and that it would be some time before the wrecking train could clear away the debris so that their train could pass through. Then six hours went by and yet they were detained.



Kate was in an extremity of impatience. Now that she had fully settled her mind upon doing what was right, she felt delay was dangerous, and her frightened soul conjured up all sorts of fears. She walked restlessly up and down the narrow little waiting-room, where were gathered the few passengers beside herself who had grown weary of the cars, and then she stepped out upon the platform in front and rapidly traversed its length and breadth, the cool night wind blowing in her feverish face and soothing her with its gentle zephyrs. Mr. Percival walked by her side unperceived. She saw nothing but the form of her loved father lying cold and still in his last long sleep in the parlor at home, deaf to the confession which had come too late.



## CHAPTER XXXIV.

*"SO HE GIVETH HIS BELOVED SLEEP."*

IT was high noon when Kate stepped out of the railway coach upon the depot platform at Oakland. It was very warm, oppressively so, and she found the waiting-room almost unbearable while waiting for Mr. Percival to take the checks to the baggage-room and obtain her baggage. While she waited there, a quick, familiar step attracted her attention, and, looking up, she saw Harold at her side. In a moment she was in his arms and sobbing on his shoulder.

"He is sleeping so sweetly, Kate," whispered her gentle brother. "It stays my tears to look at his placid face. I would not awaken him if I could."

"When did you come home?" she inquired, raising her head from its resting-place.

"I arrived about two hours ago," answered Harold. "They telegraphed me at once, and I caught the night express to Dayton. I understood that there was a wreck on your road. I supposed that you would be in on this train, and I have been to the depot twice to see if you had come."

Mr. Percival appearing at this moment with the baggage, the two young men clasped hands in silent sympathy, and they all entered a hack and were driven rapidly home.

At sight of the floating crape fastened to the



door, Kate's heart seemed to die within her; her tears burst forth afresh, and Harold put his arms tenderly about her and carried her, half-fainting, up to the privacy of her own room. One of the women who were helping about the house came in almost immediately, and gathered her in her arms. To Kate's astonishment, she saw that it was Mrs. Ransom.

"My dear child," said she, "what a sad home-coming it is for you! Bathe your face in this cologne; it will revive you. But, Kate, as sure as the world, there ought not to be any mourning for *him*. If ever a soul was ready for eternity, it was your father's. He lies like a child asleep on its mother's bosom. And he was conscious to the last, though he couldn't speak a word; but we seemed to know what he wanted to say. But Mrs. Belmont can tell you about it much better than I can. She would come up with me last night and fix up your old room. These flowers are off the very plants you raised yourself and thought so much of. I suppose you think it strange, Kate, that I am here. I want to tell you that I made a big mistake when I judged your mother as I did. She is a blessed woman, if ever there was one on the face of the earth. I know I helped to set you against her, and I want to tell you I'm sorry. I'd like to undo it now in the best way."

Kate stretched out her hand impulsively.

"Oh! Mrs. Ransom," said she, "I, too, have been so mistaken, so bitterly prejudiced. But I have come home hoping to make amends. Do you think I can?"

"Of course you can," said Mrs. Ransom,



emphatically. "She loves to forgive. Why, she received me and Sarah just as if we'd always been her best friends instead of the busy-bodies we had condescended to be. We were all too big cowards to write and tell you about it, but the way of it was just this: Brownie—bless his heart!—got it into his dear little head to try to make peace between us, and he worked things so cunningly, and finally got us all to attending the Young People's Society here; and I'll defy anybody to attend that long and not be changed throughout. The Spirit of Christ is certainly there. We couldn't stand it. Sarah and I couldn't sleep, and we got up bright and early one morning and came over and confessed everything. You needn't worry a particle, dear child. Forgiveness reigns in *her* heart."

Kate clasped her hands tightly together. "I must see her right away, Mrs. Ransom," she said, "before I see any of the rest. Where can I find her? Is she—" her voice failed; she could go no farther.

"Yes, she *is*," said Mrs. Ransom. "She stays right there with him all the time, with the Bible on her lap. The children are with Nellie in the study. There is a great change there, too, Kate. It does seem as if when the death angel once enters a home he leaves the door wide open. That dear girl isn't long for this world. Shall I go down to the parlor with you? you're so weak yet; you don't look as if you could stand alone."

"Thank you, but I would rather go alone."

She made her way down the stairs holding



by the stair-rail, for she was still faint and giddy, and approached the parlor where lay the silent sleeper. She heard Betty Ann and other women moving about the dining-room softly, and the low-toned voices in the study told her that Mr. Percival and Harold were there with Nellie and the children. She sat down in one of the hall chairs until the creeping sickness should pass away. At last she pushed open the parlor door softly and entered the room. Yes, there he lay in his calm, majestic sleep, with the unearthly beauty of the spirit world illumining his face. Beside him, gazing raptly upon the dead face, sat her step-mother, with her back to the door, never moving, never changing her position, only looking, looking as if she would fain see the heavenly country to which her beloved had journeyed; the gates of pearl through which he had entered the celestial city, and the glorious company of the "Just made perfect," with whom he was walking the golden streets and partaking of the tree of life. A feeling of awe took possession of Kate as she stood there waiting for some token that her presence was noted; but none being manifested she stepped lightly forward, her foot-fall making no noise on the soft carpet, and bent sorrowfully over the casket, upon the silver plate of which was inscribed Dr. Belmont's name and age, and the words of the Spirit: "So he giveth his beloved sleep."

"O papa!" moaned the girl, with white lips; "are you really gone never to return, and can you never hear me say that I am broken-hearted for the way I have treated you? Can



you never know that I have been repentant from my heart for months and months, and that I only lacked the courage (of my convictions) to come and tell you so? O papa! if you could only speak to me once more!"

Then she felt a sustaining arm about her, and a soft voice saying: "He will not return to us, but we shall go to him. O Kate, the promises of God are stepping-stones to heaven. Walk over your trouble on them, my dear. You know he has said they shall not overwhelm you."

"Mother!" exclaimed the agonized girl, sinking on her knees beside the casket, and clasping her mother's tender hands in hers, "hear me when I call you by that dear name to-day. Hear me when I say that I repent in my heart of all the cruel past; that my bitterness has melted away within me, and that I am forever sorry for all that I have ever done amiss to you and yours. Hear me when I say forgive, and if you can, pardon me for the sake of him who lies so still here to-day."

For answer, Mrs. Belmont stooped down and clasped the weeping Kate within the shelter of her arms, saying simply: "My daughter, now and always. All is not only forgiven, my dear, but committed to the dead past never to find a resurrection."

When she was calmer, Kate sat down by her mother's side and listened while she told her of the last few days of her father's life; how his thoughts had turned to her time and again so lovingly, recalling incidents of her childhood and dwelling on them tenderly. The very last



afternoon of his life he had said: "You must keep Katie's room ready for her, Lucia; she may come home any time now." Then he had referred to the story which gave rise to the old, well-known hymn, "There's a light in the window for thee, brother," and asked to have the different pictures of her brought to him that he might look at them, and had said softly that he believed she grew prettier with the passing of the years.

Thus comforted, Kate sat until Harold and Arthur joined them, and persuaded them to come out to the study.

"Ward will not be able to return, of course," said Mr. Percival, seating Kate in an easy chair.

"Of course not," returned Harold. "He was telegraphed, but he couldn't possibly reach here in time for the funeral, and I don't expect him to come at all. As for Uncle Richard, he has a constitutional antipathy to death. He never goes to a funeral. I could not prevail on him to be here. He says he wants to remember father as he left him, alive and well."

"And yet, with Christ, he is 'alive forevermore,'" said the young minister, in his earnest way. "Oh! if we could only learn to look beyond; for up there where he is to-day 'The inhabitant shall not say I am sick.' Oh! how 'blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.'"



## CHAPTER XXXV.

### *STANDING BY HIS COLORS.*

WARD sat in his room in Pasadena with bowed head and tearful eyes. A telegram announcing the death of his father fluttered in his nervous hand, and the burning tears fell as he looked at the fatal words: "Father passed away this evening at eight o'clock."

One of the bitterest thoughts in the boy's mind was, that he could not be present to see him laid away. Before he could make half the distance, the dear father would be buried beside his precious mother in Oakland cemetery. A groan as bitter as death burst from his overcharged heart as he swept, with his mental eye, the past, and realized, as he had many times done already, that, if he had only taken Harold's advice, he would have been with them all at home instead of in far-off California. The temptation to go at any cost was strong. The tidings had made him home-sick. But he at once reflected that he could not honorably cancel his engagement with Mr. Randall, and that to go and return would take a much larger sum of money than he could command, besides using up every dollar that he was devoting toward another remittance for mother and the children; and they needed it so much—Ward could imagine just how much. It was his secret ambition to become in time the mainstay of the family, and to this end he had become



so self-denying that Mr. Randall was prone to rally him unmercifully at times upon his avariciousness ; for Ward, with his characteristic reserve, had kept the pitiful home-life hidden in the depths of his own heart, revealing nothing except the mere fact of his father's helpless condition.

It was now no hardship for him to pass his leisure hours in his own room, for he found the books which Mr. McVay had commissioned him to read and to make his own very interesting ; and, as he progressed, he became more and more convinced that his father knew best what his abilities and qualifications were. He had already had his dreams of returning home flushed with success, with a brilliant future shining in the distance, the man that his father had longed to see him become.

But that dear father would now never see the result of his whispered prayers to God. Still, he could honor that father's precious memory ; he could "quit himself like a man," and carry out, with unflinching purpose, his dear father's wishes ; and God would know. He raised his head, and a smile broke over his troubled face. The thought had sweetened the bitter cup that he was obliged to drink. God knew, though father might never do so, and he would make it all right. He would just lay down all worry, and trust God. Drawing toward him the little writing-table with which his room was supplied, he wrote a tender letter of regret to Harold, saying at the close that he meant to be, in every way he could, the man papa had wanted to see him become ; and would not Harold pray



for him that he might "grow up into Christ in all things"?

After writing this letter, Ward knelt down by the side of the little table, and prayed that God would crown his efforts with success; that he would enable him to be a moral hero; to be never ashamed of his colors, but to be such a standard-bearer among his fellows that they might also be moved to join the army of the Lord. Ward did need courage along these lines—as what young man does not?—for he had found it something of a difficult matter to stand by his colors without flinching, everywhere and before everybody. It had, perhaps, been the hardest to do right in Mr. Randall's household, and he felt that he had never yet really made himself understood. He saw that Meta, the daughter, either was, or pretended to be, puzzled over his withdrawal from the card-table; that she either would not, or could not, understand his declining to attend herself and her mother to the theatre, when "papa purchased the tickets"; that she looked very unbelievably, to say the least, at his "goody-goody" notions in attending church and Sunday-school so faithfully. But Ward had never felt that he could state right out that he was now a Christian, and could not conscientiously do those things which he had done heretofore. It seemed to him that it would sound too much like judging, for Mr. and Mrs. Randall, as well as Meta, were both members in good standing of the Russell-Street Church. Wouldn't it look exactly as if he were making himself out to be a better Christian than they? He remembered



how he had always felt about such things. But to-night, as he arose from his knees after making that earnest appeal to God, he determined to embrace the first opportunity to let them all know exactly where he stood on these questions. He did not want to trail the King's colors in the dust.

The opportunity presented itself sooner than he expected. One evening after tea he was retiring to his room as usual, when Mr. Randall stayed him. "How now, Ward. What are you doing with yourself every night up there alone in your room? Practicing gymnastics or writing love-letters? You didn't use to make such a hermit of yourself. Come, own up, now. We miss you. Meta has been sulky every evening for a month."

Ward flushed. He had meant to keep his law-books a secret for the present, not knowing but his employer might feel uneasy about it; but being questioned in so direct a manner, he could not well help making a direct reply. So he said: "I am trying to study a little, sir."

Mr. Randall looked grave immediately. "Are you sorry, Ward," said he, "do you regret for a moment giving up your last year at school for labor? because, if you do, just say so, and I will put you through right here at my own expense. You know that I have made you the offer before. I don't forget that your father earnestly wished you to be an educated man. I confess that I have sometimes been sorry that I urged you to leave. Perhaps I might better have held my tongue, but I meant only kindness, I really did. And you have done



well for a boy, Ward, and will soon do better. If you stick to it, you will, as I said, make your fortune by the time you are thirty."

"It isn't that, Mr. Randall. I am not studying school-books. I am reading law under the direction of Mr. Austin McVay. He is an old friend of my step-mother, and at her request has interested himself in me a good deal. I—"

"Oh! of course I know McVay," interrupted Mr. Randall. "Everybody knows him. He is one of the finest lawyers in Pasadena. Besides that, he is a nice man. And your step-mother is a friend of his, hey? Well, I declare! You don't—" as his sharp, shrewd gaze rested on the boy standing before him, "you are not going to let that man make a lawyer of you after all?"

Ward's face flushed scarlet, but the resolute look on it never wavered for a moment. "I was just going to say," said he, "that I am thinking of entering his office when I get through here, Mr. Randall. I feel differently from what I did—well, from what I did when I came here. It is not only my father's death which has turned my thoughts into another channel and made me wish to fulfil his desires—not all that. There is something else. The change which I have recently met with has made me better acquainted with myself and my possibilities. I find now within me a reaching out toward professional life. I know, now, that my father saw it was there."

Mr. Randall regarded him quizzically. "This change you mention," said he; "what may I understand by that?"



Ward swallowed something that seemed to choke him; then looking up, he replied: "I had hoped you had seen it and understood. It is the change which only the God of salvation can work, Mr. Randall. It is the change from 'darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God.'"

Mr. Randall's eyes were misty. He glanced nervously at his wife and daughter who were still sitting idly at the table, and seemed, for just a moment, at a loss for a reply. Then he said, slowly: "I had observed that change, Ward, and I'm glad you've made it. Your life needed it not more than most boys, but there was a time when, I am free to confess, I had some fears for your future. There was a look about your face that told some pretty hard stories. Yes, I am glad you have started a new growth, and I have seen it, and I meant to speak about it, but it doesn't come easy for me to talk about religion; but I believe it's a good thing, a very good thing, especially for young men. I should not want to be without it myself. And if, my boy, you feel that you want to cancel our engagement, I am ready any time, though I do think almost as much of you as if you were my own boy. But no doubt your father knew best. Well, my boy, success to you; we will not detain you longer."

"There is one thing more that I should like to say, sir, now that we are on the subject," said Ward, advancing a step or two further into the room. "I presume you think it strange that I have refused to have a hand at cards, or go to the theatre, or things of like nature as I



have done lately. I want to say that I can't do these things and be the right kind of a Christian. They are wrong for *me*. I do not presume to say they are wrong for you. You must judge for yourselves about that. But they lead me into all kinds of extravagancies; they are a constant source of temptation to me. Once they led me into something very closely resembling a crime. The only way for me to do is to say no to every one of them, now and always."

He waited for a moment for some one to reply, but as there was only an embarrassing silence, he stepped quietly to the door, opened it, shut it softly after him, and retired to his room.



## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### *META.*

**M**R. and Mrs. Randall had gone out for the evening, and Meta was alone in the drawing-room. The room was a very pleasant one. The gas lit it all up brilliantly, and brought into full view the many costly and beautiful things with which it was filled. A grand piano stood invitingly open; a lovely silver-tongued music-box reposed upon a stand not far away, waiting for fairy fingers to wind it up; books and pictures of every description were scattered about in rich profusion; but Meta had no use for them to-night. She seemed restless and unhappy. Now she promenaded up and down the room; now she toyed with the curtains; and again she sat down upon an easy chair, and gazed at the beds of roses in the carpet. Two or three times she made great preparations to do a bit of fancy work; but after going upstairs for the material, and searching her mother's work-box through two or three times for a suitable needle, she took but half-a-dozen stitches, and tossed the costly fabric upon a little stand near by, with a much-disgusted air.

"I wish that Ward would come in," she murmured to herself, wandering aimlessly about the room. "I don't see what there is in those tiresome old prayer-meetings for him to like. I went once with Susie Holbrook, and that was enough for me. I don't see why religion need



to change people so; it never changed *me* one mite. I wish that Ward hadn't said what he did about it, anyway. I haven't felt comfortable since. It stirred me all up, and I don't like it. 'From darkness to light,' he said. Why, that's an awful change! I guess I'd be apt to know it if I had passed through it. I'm going to ask him more about it when he comes in, anyway. There he is now," she added, as the hall-door opened and shut, and Ward's footsteps fell on the floor going in the direction of the stairs. She opened the parlor-door abruptly. "Ward!" she called, "wait a minute; I want to see you."

"Well, take a good look," said the boy, teasingly, turning round; and then, as he saw that she waited for him, he advanced toward her. "I had an idea that 'distance lends enchantment,'" said he; "but, if a closer observation of my classic phiz is especially to be desired, I am at your service. If you have your sketching materials ready, I hope you will not detain me long, for my books are awaiting me, you know."

Meta stamped her small foot impatiently.

"That's the way *always*!" she said. "You never have a minute to spare any more. I am just as good as your old books. Why don't you study *me*?"

With a comical grimace, Ward folded his arms, and, bending forward, struck a match and held it close to her face while he gazed at it inquiringly.

"Let me see," said he; "you have brown hair—I don't know just exactly what shade to



call it, whether golden, seal, or nut. I guess it is betwixt and between—with a tendency to wriggle into curls. Light-blue, sparkling, rather angry-looking eyes, full of lightning flashes; a kind of vegetable nose, and a mouth that is awfully pouty just now. There! my match has burned out. If you will come a little nearer the chandelier, my dear little volume in blue and gold, I can see better how to read the next page.”

For answer, he received a smart slap, and Meta burst into a laugh.

“You provoking boy,” said she, “you are just too mean! Come into the drawing-room. I am all alone, and just as lonesome as I can be. Besides, I want to ask you some really solemn questions.”

“Well, if I must, I must,” said Ward, following her into the drawing-room and throwing himself into an easy chair. Now, then, Miss Prosecuting Attorney, begin. Question number one? Fire away.”

“If you are so anxious to be so wonderfully good, I shouldn’t think you would talk slang,” said the fifteen-year-old girlie, reprovingly; “I don’t think that’s nice.”

“Neither do I, Meta,” said Ward, honestly and gravely. “I am trying my level best to break off these old habits, but they stick just like burs. I sometimes almost despair of getting rid of them; but, after all——”

“After all, what?” asked Meta, curling herself up in a corner of the divan, and gazing at the boy in the chair with a pair of very curiously inquiring eyes.



"I was going to say," resumed Ward, "that it is possible to do anything with Christ to help. The Bible is clear upon that point, so I need not excuse myself. If I am weak, he is mighty. Of course we all know that there is no limit to his power and strength."

"*How* do you know it?" questioned his small companion, eagerly. "How can people know such things? How dare they trust in anything of that kind just because the Bible says so?"

"Why, because they experience it," replied Ward. "As we need strength beyond what is human, God gives it to us, and we are actually carried right through things that we know we couldn't have taken a step in alone. Don't you remember the children of Israel, how they were led by the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire through that vast wilderness? Would they have reached Canaan without God, do you think? Why, he has always been the strength of his people. Just think what wonderful things he helped them to do! They stopped the mouths of lions, raised the dead to life, bore the most terrible tortures (and lots of this you get from other histories besides the Bible); they were slain with the sword, thrown into boiling oil, sawn asunder, flayed alive, and lived anywhere—in dens and caves of the earth. Christ was their strength, you see; and he is just the same to-day. He gave your mother strength to nurse you through the typhoid fever; I have heard her acknowledge it more than once. She said that she never could have taken care of you through all those long, weary weeks if God had not supported her. And I



know he has helped me more than once. Why cannot you believe this, Meta? What is in the way?"

"I don't know," replied Meta, striking the arm of the divan with her clenched hand; "I don't think I believe anything now, or know anything to believe. I don't read the Bible; I never have read it of any account at all, and I have heard precious little of it read. I can't say that I like it much, either. It's queer and old-fashioned, and dry and hard to understand. I am a member of the Russell-Street Church, though, and so are mamma and papa; and of course we expect to be saved and to go to heaven—*of course* we do! But—I do wish, Ward Belmont, that you hadn't talked out your thoughts and beliefs as you did the other day. It has just made me mad with myself; I'm not a bit happy any more; I can't enjoy myself as I used to do in playing cards and going to the theatre and to dances and everything, because you think it is wrong; and if it is wrong for you, I can't help feeling afraid that it is so for me and the rest of us. And then, I can't believe it, either, because—as if we'd keep on doing it if we knew it was!—papa and mamma as well as myself. I'd just like to know how your religion came to turn you around this way. You used to be so different. I liked you better, too."

"I'm sorry for that," said Ward, "because I am of the opinion that I'm a better fellow on the whole, and there's a good deal more of me to like. But I can't say that I am sorry for having stirred you up, Meta. I am glad that you are thinking, because thought always leads



to action sooner or later, and you will think yourself into doing the right thing by-and-by. I do want you to be 'happy in Jesus,' Meta. I am praying for it every day."

"Do you like going to prayer-meeting?" she asked, abruptly. "What was it like to-night?"

"Yes, I love to go," replied Ward, with shining eyes. "I wouldn't miss it for anything. What was it like to-night? Do you remember the old hymn called 'Retreat'? They used to sing it in my father's church at Oakland so much. The last verse is this:

"There, there on eagle wings we soar,  
And sin and sense molest no more;  
And heaven comes down our souls to greet,  
And glory crowns the mercy-seat."

It was like that verse, Meta, exactly, to me. I wish you had been there to see."

"Tell me about it," said Meta. "What did they have to say that was so nice?"

"Well," said Ward, with a long-drawn sigh of satisfaction as he mentally reviewed the feast from which he had just come so refreshed and fed, "it was a meeting especially devoted to the interests of temperance. The pastor read the twelfth chapter of Romans to open the meeting. You know what it is—"

"No, I don't," interrupted Meta. "I haven't the slightest idea of what is contained in the twelfth of Romans. You've got to tell me."

"It is about presenting our bodies a living sacrifice to the Lord. I have my Bible right here. Let me read you the lesson so you can understand. After the reading and two or three prayers, the pastor called for voluntary



speakers, and there was an old man away over in the corner—I haven't an idea who he is—got up and asked for prayers for his son who was thinking of being a Christian, but who couldn't make up his mind to give up his business, which is that of a rum-seller. You ought to have heard the prayers that followed that request. There must have been a dozen of them; every one of them brief and right to the point. One young man prayed just these simple words, but they went to everybody's heart: 'O Lord, true and faithful, give this man the power to give up his old heart for a new one filled with thy love.' Then there was a reformed drinker got up and told his experience. He said he had resolved over and over again to turn over a new leaf, but every time he failed; and he never succeeded until he let Christ have his body as well as his soul. 'I was a bartender,' said he, 'and just as long as I stuck to that I couldn't be a Christian—the thing was impossible. But just as soon as I let it all go, and trusted God for honest labor, I found myself on the solid rock.' Oh! I can't begin to tell you all, Meta. There were requests for prayer all over the house—mothers for their sons, sisters for their brothers, a doctor for a brother physician, and one dear little girl for a drunken father. Right in the midst of it, maybe, someone would raise a song, and—words fail me. You must go yourself and see."

"Ward," said Meta, slowly, "do you think it would do me any good to go to a prayer-meeting like that?"

"I am sure it would, Meta."



"Perhaps I may make up my mind to go with you next time; and it may be that I shall not play cards much more, Ward. Papa has been somewhat worried about it since you said what you did. Do you suppose they did come near ruining you, Ward, really?"

"I know they really did, Meta."

"Then I *hate* them!" exclaimed the impulsive girl, "and I shall never take pleasure in playing them again; and I wish that I knew how to be your kind of a Christian; you seem so happy, and I am not happy, not one bit. Where did you get this lovely Bible, Ward? Here is poetry on the fly-leaf, 'Rest him, O loving Spirit.' Who wrote that?"

"My step-mother," said Ward, reverently. "That poem has been like an angel's hand beckoning me on towards heaven. I was so tired of life as I was living it. I knew in my soul that I was capable of better things, but I never thought of being rested by the Spirit of Christ until she showed me how."

"Your step-mother must be a good woman," said Meta. "I should like to know her—I should like to know her very much."

"How would you like to correspond with her?" asked Ward, as a bright thought struck him. "She writes the loveliest letters I ever read."

"Thank you," said Meta. "I should like it very much. I know it would do me good. But I do not need you any more, Ward, now. You can go up-stairs to your books. I believe I had rather be by myself while I think all these things out. Good-night."



## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### *HELPING TO LIFT THE LOAD.*

THERE were sad hearts in the house in Rose street. The husband and father had been quietly laid away to his rest among the blessed dead; and it seemed to the mourning hearts left behind that their sun had gone down forever behind the bank of dark clouds with which the providence of God had covered their domestic sky. How lonely the house seemed! How strange to miss the tinkle of the little silver bell which had so often called their weary feet from their tasks to some gentle ministry in the sick-room! It seemed as if they must still go about making the very same preparations for the night that they had been used to; as if the night nurse must come in just as usual; as if there must still come from the sacred, hallowed room where he had lain so long the voice, the patient, calm, quiet voice, which had been such a source of spiritual strength to one and all through the passing of this weary time. The children found themselves stepping about as softly as ever, and peeping in, in their old way, at the door of "papa's room," only to see the bed forever empty; and then they would flee away sobbing to mother, and hide their heads upon her sheltering, aching heart.

To Kate the clouds hung low and dark, and the ache in her heart grew more intense with every passing hour. Although relieved by what had passed between her stepmother and her-



self, she was almost sick with grief; and the harrowing thought of what she might have done to make the last days of her father some of his happiest and best weighed heavily upon her mind. Besides, she could not help seeing that her stepmother had grown old and careworn under the constant strain, and that the time was quickly approaching when her strength would once more be put to the test, for Nellie was nearing the end of her journey very rapidly. Aside from all this, there were the pecuniary difficulties lying all along the pathway. How were all the additional expenses to be met? Kate thought hard over it all as they sat together that evening, but she dreaded to break the silence by asking a single question. She contented herself with taking Brownie on her lap and hugging him closely to her heart; but how she wished that some one would speak! The widow was the first one to break the silence.

"I suppose that Harry will be obliged to get back to his studies as soon as possible," said she, quietly. "Would you like to start on the early train in the morning, my son? If so, I will see that you have your breakfast in advance of the others."

Harold rocked back and forth for a moment without replying. Then, folding his arms deliberately across his breast, he said, huskily: "I don't know, mother. It doesn't seem right for me to go back and leave you so much alone. Nellie is fading rapidly; we cannot help but see it; and to leave you with such a load of care upon your shoulders, and with only the children



for company, isn't kind or right. I think that I would best give up my studies for a while, and remain with you."

Mrs. Belmont laid her hand softly upon the arm of his chair.

"You forget, dear," said she, "that I am never alone; that the God of consolation and strength is ever with me, and that he has promised to strengthen as the day shall demand. I don't know of anything that would make me more unhappy than for you to allow your studies to be interrupted. It was one of papa's greatest comforts to think of your carrying on his work, and, perhaps, reaping the fields which he has sown. No, no; I can never consent to that. You must go right on and finish your education. I shall get along nicely. The Lord is the best of providers. Don't fear for me."

"Of course," said Harold, "there are some things to be considered. My education is costing me nothing, to begin with; and, once it is obtained, I shall be in a position really to do something for you. But, after all, mother, you are alone, with a dying child to care for, and it does not seem right. I feel that I ought to insist upon staying with you."

Once, and not a very long time ago, Kate would have taken this as a hint, and would probably have broken out with something like this: "Oh! yes, *of course!* I know what you mean. You expect *me* to give up my work and come home here and stay with her and help her! As if *I* ought to be the only one to make sacrifices! I have already done too much, and never got any thanks for it, either!" But there



was a great and a good change in Kate, and to-night she felt differently. Her mind had undergone a reforming influence in a good many things. She saw plainly now that what she had done for her father and the children had not always been done in the right spirit, and that she had not recognized what they had done for her. Nellie's hacking, restless cough smote painfully upon her ears; and as she thought of the girl going out of life in the very bloom of her youth; of the mother's lonely days and nights to come; of her long, weary struggle with finances, Kate's resolution was taken. Claspings closer to her beating heart the sleepy little boy still sitting in her lap, she spoke out suddenly and resolutely: "Mother is not to stay alone, Harold. I shall be with her; so you need not worry."

"You!" exclaimed the young man. "Why, Kate, how is such a thing possible? Your school——"

"My school is over for the summer," said Kate, quietly, rocking Brownie back and forth; "and when the fall term begins, there are plenty of girls right there in Clinton who will be only too glad to take my place. There will be no difficulty about the school. Of course I know that it is not the thing for mother to continue here all alone and struggle along to make a living for the children; neither is it right for you to throw away such a good opportunity for a complete education. It is worth everything to you, and you must have it. I only wish that it had been my lot to have a better one. Ward is away, tied to his work, and there is no one



but me. It's all right. Now, don't say a word, for I'm settled."

Harold looked at her in amazement. This was something so different from the Kate that he had been used to. The Kate that he knew thought first and always of herself, and was hurt if others did not do so, too.

"But, my dear," interposed the mother, softly, "you know that I am quite used to being here with only the children for company. I do not mind it at all. There is no need of your making such a sacrifice for me, although I want to say how much I appreciate it. I shall get along as nicely as can be."

"Be that as it may," said Kate, resolutely, "I shall stay if you will let me; and I don't know that it can rightly be called 'a sacrifice.' I think I am glad to be at home once more—perhaps more so than I thought I should be—and there are so many things to be done, and, now that Nellie is laid aside, only one pair of hands to do them. I shall stay, and—I have been thinking that perhaps we might take a few boarders. Mrs. Ransom was telling me that there was an overflow of students the last term, and that even more are expected for this coming year. Our dining-room is a good-sized one, and I believe that I have an undeveloped talent for managing a club. I should like to try my hand at it, anyway; and I know that some women in this town have made money by it. I do hope that nobody will say a word," as Mrs. Belmont and Harold both tried to expostulate, "because it does seem to me that it is the only thing for me to do right now, and I'm



bound to do something to make some money. I can't sit down and have people sew their lives out to put bread in my mouth. It isn't good in me, nor a sacrifice, nor anything of the kind. I think it's right, and I want to do it. If I don't exactly love it at first, I shall grow to do so by-and-by. I have a convenient way of liking anything that I very much desire to do."

"My dear, you must really allow me to say something," said Mrs. Belmont, "if it is only to tell you how much I appreciate your thoughtful and unselfish kindness. I shall be in every way delighted to have you with me; and I have reason to know, as we all have, what a good housekeeper you are. The plan is a good one, and will smooth the way very materially. But do you think it is best and wisest to do this? Your school appreciates you, and it seems a pity for you to give it up and come home to worry along with us. Our Father will supply all our needs. I have never yet trusted him in vain."

Kate struggled with her feelings a moment before replying. She had led such a proud, reserved life that she found it difficult to break through its icy crust and let the strong, pent-up springs of emotion flow through her words and actions. They broke forth with a violence that threatened to destroy both voice and expression.

"Please *don't!*" she burst out. "I cannot bear it. My resolution is taken. I am sure I am right in this; and I know, when you understand that I feel it to be my duty, you will cease to object."



"I will raise no more objections—not one," said her mother. "And now I must slip away to Nellie. It is our trysting-time. Brownie, boy, you and Mamie had better seek your nests. It is time for birdies like you to tuck their heads under their wings for the night."

Taking the sleepy children by the hand, the mother left the room.

"Kate," said Harold, when they were left alone, "may I say how blessed is the change in you? Truly, 'What hath God wrought!'"

"And, Harold," said Kate, putting her two hands upon his stalwart shoulders, "you will, perhaps, be more astonished when you hear me say that I regard our stepmother as one of our choicest blessings. I owe more than I can ever tell to her Christian love and her earnest prayers. May God bless her!"

"Amen!" said Harold.



## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### *A SERIOUS QUESTION.*

THE summer wore away, and with it went the sweet life of the gentle Nellie. Kate had grown to love her dearly, and many were the heart-talks which the two girls had together in the early evenings, before it was time to light the lamps, and the soft twilight was all that they had to relieve the gloaming. Kate's return and Ward's happy change of heart had been sources of the greatest comfort to the dying girl. She said that it seemed as if the Lord was scattering roses upon her pathway to the better world.

"It was something that I had prayed for so long," said Nellie, one evening. "It seemed as if I could not be content to go home to heaven and be so happy, and leave you all here so unsettled and comfortless. It has always seemed to me as if there was a great mistake made when we came into the family, although I know that God never makes mistakes, and mamma ought not, when she leans so hard on the everlasting arms."

"There was no mistake made at all," said Kate, generously, leaning her head on the little pale hand that she held, for Nellie was confined to her bed now, and Kate was seated in a low rocker by her bedside. "Let me tell you something, my dear little sister. If you had not come, I am certain that I should have made a sad tangle of things. I can see it now very



plainly. Of course I was only a girl, and did not understand economy, and I was determined to have everything just the very nicest; and the housekeeping bills were enormous. Papa, dear man, never said a word. Of course he would not, for I verily believe that I did do the best I knew how; but I suspect that it was the beginning of his getting into debt; and all the time I had an idea that I was a perfect steam-engine and was carrying everything in the world in my train on a smooth track. Well, you know something of how things were when you came, and how your mother saved our home to us, and worked to take care of poor papa and the children. But even that was not the worst of my crooked paths. I was not teaching the children anything good, and I was a bad example to them all the time and a downward influence. I did take good care of their bodies, but their souls—I shudder now to think what they would have been if left to me. God delivered them, and sent them a teacher after his own heart, and I can thank him for it now. Oh! dear Nellie, if it was a mistake, it was a blessed one. It has been the salvation of this house. I should have made shipwreck of myself and the rest if it had not been for your mother; though I will do myself the justice to say that I believe I was more blind than I was dishonest all the time.”

“What a comfort to know that in that world to which we are journeying we ‘shall see as we are seen, and know as we are known’!” said Nellie, softly. “No mistaken lives up there, at any rate. I do so long to be there, Katie.”



"Do you?" asked Kate, earnestly, bending her gaze upon the wan face. "I can understand to some extent; but to me this world is a delightful place. I enjoy the struggle, the toil, the constant overcoming. If I may only gain the crown of a conqueror, I shall be more than satisfied. I know that it will take a lifetime, but I really feel as if I were making some advances. But, Nellie, if to you death seems but the opening of heaven's gate, to your mother, to me, to all who are left behind, it is a relentless enemy. The sting has not yet gone out of it. It is so sad to have you leave us when we have all learned to love you so."

"But it is so much better for me," said the tired girl, speaking with difficulty. "I have been a cripple nearly all my life, and it has been such a trial to me. I have needed so much grace to bear it. I have fretted so much because I must necessarily be a burden to my friends. I have always prayed that I might not live to be old. It is so good of God to take me so soon."

"Hush, dear!" Kate raised a warning hand as the door opened, and the mother entered with her comforting smile, and with the little supper-tray in her hand; for no hand but the mother's ever carried in that tray, and no one but the mother ever sat with Nellie while she ate, with feeble appetite, the food so delicately prepared. Kate rose as she approached, and went out to help Betty Ann put the finishing touches to the family tea.

Brownie was studying his geography lesson by the dining-room lamp and Mamie was writ-



ing a composition, while Clyde was putting together an arithmetical puzzle, the latest birthday present from mamma. In the olden time, Kate would have scattered them all in a twinkling, and have scolded them all well for having their arms on the table; but now she contented herself with bringing the little stand out of the hall and placing it so that the rays from the hanging lamp would fall full upon it; and when she had set some chairs cosily about it, she requested the little students to change their quarters, pointing out the advantage of their having a study-table all to themselves.

"Kate isn't a bit like she used to be, is she?" whispered Mamie, as her sister disappeared in the kitchen, and the children gleefully made the exchange of tables. "Don't you remember how she used to scold us for every little thing, and how stingy she was with the warm cookies when she baked? Now she goes about looking nice and smiley, and she lets us have little parties whenever we want them."

"She used to make birthday parties for us, though, Mamie," said Brownie, who always tried to bring forward all the good things about people; "and she was very pleasant sometimes. I remember how I used to lay my head in her lap, and sometimes she'd play with my curls. Kate was pretty good, too, Mamie; and we were a lot of trouble, you know."

"Nothing like she is now, though," stoutly asserted the little maiden, "and I know the reason: she prays now; I've seen her lots of times; and she never used to do it—before me, anyway."



"Kate's a first-rate girl," said Clyde, looking up for a minute from his puzzle. "I like her the best kind."

"I know somebody else who does, too," said Mamie, with a wise look. "It's a secret—you mustn't breathe a word of it—but I heard Miss Sarah Bush tell mamma that she was just as sure as anything that Mr. Percival intends to ask Kate to marry him."

Brownie's sunny face actually grew quite dark.

"I don't like that at all," said he. "That upsets my plans. I meant to take care of Kate myself. I shall make a great deal of money, and I want to take you and Kate everywhere—around the world, maybe. Wouldn't you like to go west and see the Rockies and the geysers, and the gold mines and big trees in California, and down south to Florida, and eat oranges and figs off the trees, and see the alligators? A person would have a picnic all the time."

Brownie had just begun to study geography, and he lived in dreamland, wandering over land and sea, communing with the different nations, and building great air-castles in regard to what he meant to do when he grew up, and became the owner of a line of steamers, or the superintendent of a mammoth railway which should belt the world.

Just as the leaves began to fall, sweet Nellie passed away as softly as fades a summer day, and the house missed another presence. However, their mourning had in it the beautiful hope of the resurrection; and they laid away the mortal remains, knowing that when they



saw her again, it would be in the glorious likeness of her Saviour.

The winter slipped away, and spring came once more, bringing with it the house-cleaning and other extra work. Kate went through it with flying colors, and with the help of Betty Ann, papered the upstairs rooms afresh, bought and made up a new carpet for the sitting-room, rolled the sewing-machine into what used to be papa's study, and made everything as fresh as a new-blown rose. Then she brought a little roll of bills and laid them lovingly in her step-mother's lap.

"There!" said she, "behold the surplus! That much after all expenses are met, and over and above what I have spent in freshening up the house. I think that keeping boarders pays first-rate."

"Twenty-five dollars!" exclaimed Mrs. Belmont, with a smile of exquisite pleasure. "My dear, you have made a grand success of it. I believe you are using your talents in the right direction. No, no," putting the little roll back into Kate's hand, "I shall not accept a gift like that, my love. It makes me feel like a thief to even think of it. You will need it all. By the way, have you heard the good news? Some ladies were in this morning, and they told me that the Grace-Street Church has given Mr. Percival a call."

Kate's face flushed. She had heard intimations of such a thing before, but it seemed almost too good to be true. She laughed in a light way as she replied: "That counts another boarder for me, mother, dear. Arthur won't dare go anywhere else."



"I don't know, dear," replied Mrs. Belmont. "They are talking very earnestly about building a parsonage, and I shouldn't wonder if they really accomplish it this time. You know they have agitated the subject several times, even when papa was living; but, as he was a property-holder, the case was not so urgent. I wish they would; I think it would be very nice."

A strange little smile accompanied these words, which Kate pretended not to see.

With the evening came the gentleman himself. He was quite one of the family now, and was greeted loudly by the younger members of it, who crowded into his encircling arms as soon as he was seated in his own peculiar chair. But, though as cordial and genial as ever, he was just a little absent-minded, and his eyes wandered oftener than usual to Kate's tall, lithe form, as she moved about the room doing the little last things belonging to a very busy day. He lingered long after the children's bedtime, and discussed the probabilities of his accepting or rejecting the call which the church had given him. As the clock struck ten, Mrs. Belmont gathered up her spectacles and retreated to the study, saying that she always liked to spend an hour or so in papa's room in reading before retiring; and Kate and Mr. Percival were left alone.

He moved his chair nearer to the little stand upon which lay her needle-work, with a part of which she was busy.

"Can't you put that up for to-night?" said he, with a note of concern in his voice. "I have something to talk with you about."



"I don't see how my sewing need be in the way of your tongue," replied she, with a little laugh. "I am pressed for time, and Brownie needs his waist. Schoolboys are a terror to waists and trousers, you know."

He made an impatient little gesture, then asked abruptly: "Kate, shall I accept this call?"

"That is not a question for me to decide," said she, flushing a little under his searching glance.

"For you to decide, and no one else," he answered. "Thus far you have my future in your hands."

"Then I say, accept it, by all means," she returned, speaking lightly, "as it will be a help to our finances, for I shall expect you to board here."

"But I shan't board here," said he, in a peculiar tone. "There is to be a parsonage, and I am expected to occupy it, if I can get some nice little body to keep house for me. If not, I shall be compelled to notify the committee to look further. I mean it," as Kate laughed.

"Well," said she, "there is Mrs. Martin; she has no home, and she would make you a lovely housekeeper. I will speak to her about it, if you wish me to do so."

"Mrs. Martin will not do at all," he replied. "Not but that she is a very nice lady, but she is not the lady whom I want. Kate, let us be serious about this. We must not trifle over a question which deeply affects the lives of both of us, and upon which hangs the acceptance or rejection of this call. I am sure that you know



it is you whom I want, and you only. I have always loved you; always intended to make you my wife if I could. I have been waiting only for one thing, and that was for you to give your whole life to Jesus. I believe that you have done this, and that you can be my helper in my work. You know what a minister's life and labor is. You know me. Now, the question is, Are you willing to undertake the position which I ask you to fill? If you are not, I cannot come here. Can you answer me to-night, Kate?"

There was a growing light on Kate's face. Arthur held out his hand, and she placed hers in it, with the words: "If you think me fit, Arthur, after—all you know about me; if you love me and want me, as you say—oh! Arthur, I never expected you to choose *me!*"



## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### *OUTWARD BOUND.*

KATE had been settled in the parsonage as Arthur Percival's wife for somewhat over two years. It had been a happy period for her, and she had developed into an excellent woman, with whom the Grace-Street Church of Oakland was more than satisfied. As will be remembered, the church had always had a very tender feeling for Kate, not only because she was her mother's daughter, but because she was a brisk and energetic leader in their midst; and, now that she led them closer to Jesus; now that she upheld the women's devotional meetings, and moved them to greater spirituality and more earnest endeavor, she was beloved in a larger and better sense. No one was more welcome to the sick than she, for she carried in with her the brightness and breeziness of the outside world, charmed away their aches and pains, and gave them something helpful to think of. She had especially kept in touch with the young people, not only in the church, but in the world around her; and, as her pleasant home was always thrown open, they gathered in there from time to time to have their social tea-meetings, their rehearsals for their monthly concerts, and their consultations as to ways and means for accomplishing this and that.

With her stepmother's consent, she had taken Brownie to live with her when she went to her



new home. It was a very hard matter for Mrs. Belmont to let him go, but she understood just how Kate longed for him, and she knew that it would be for his advantage, as Kate and Mr. Percival were better able to give him an education than she was. To Mamie the separation was almost a cruel one; but she was so busy with her school and her music, of which she meant to make great things, that she soon became reconciled, the more so that they met almost every day at each other's homes.

It was June, the month of roses, and Kate's house was being decorated in a special manner, evidently for some extraordinary event. Mamie was there, busily arranging flowers into one design after another, for which she had a special talent; Brownie and Clyde were hurried off down street upon one errand after another; the front room upstairs was undergoing secret adornings under Mrs. Belmont's supervision; and Kate was out in the kitchen with her help, concocting marvels in the way of evening refreshments. It was plain that company of some kind was expected; and perhaps Kate's own words, as she makes one of her hurried trips upstairs to "see how mother is getting along," will explain the mystery.

"You see," said Kate, "Mrs. Knox wanted them to be married at her house, but I told her and Harold, too, that Edna Richie had been too dear a friend to me for me to let her be married to him anywhere except in my own little parlor; and, as she is an orphan, without home or relatives, it comes about so nicely, doesn't it? I think that it is exactly the thing.



Oh! I know! Of course you would like to do all sorts of unselfish things in the nicest way; but you have served your day and generation, and now it is my turn. Edna has plenty of friends who would be delighted to have her married at their homes; but I do think that I ought to have the preference. Mrs. Knox will come with her on the noon train, and Harold telegraphs that he will be here without fail at three o'clock. The ceremony is to be at eight this evening, and they are to start for Uncle Dick's to-morrow. They will stay there until the middle of July, Harry writes. The steamer sails on the thirty-first, you know. Doesn't it seem strange to have them go away off to China as missionaries? They are going entirely for love's sake, too; for, as Uncle Dick has made Harold his heir, he need do nothing except sit down and enjoy this world if he likes. But nothing will satisfy either Harold or Edna but to carry the gospel to China. The only cloud to this little wedding is that Ward will not be here. However, they intend to stop off to see him. And do you know, mother, dear, that when I think of the success we are all being enabled to make of life, my heart always feels as though it ought to thank you? You carried Ward over the most critical period of his life, and you helped Harold to his education; you are making a musician of Mamie, denying yourself everything, that she may have a classical education. So many times, when we have needed help, you have stepped forward and planned out a way; and we can only love you in return."



"There is no return so great as love," responded the mother, kissing the blooming cheek so near her. "But I fear that you are multiplying my endeavors by too great a number. I have simply done what seemed to be duty. I think I have had very good ground in which to sow my seed, though, Katie. The growth has been luxuriant. For instance, look at Ward. He has fulfilled his contract with Mr. Randall, and is making magnificent progress under the direction of Mr. McVay. In a year or two, at furthest, he will be admitted to the bar; and Mr. McVay wrote me, just the other day, of the out-and-out Christian life he is leading among his fellows, and of the wonderful influence that he has over them. Ah! dear Kate, if I have done some seed-sowing and some helping, you have done a great deal of cultivating and growing."

"I am glad you can say that," said Kate. "I believe I have tried to grow." Then, turning a final look on the pretty room, she said: "How cool and summery it all looks, mother! Quite bridey, I think."

At this moment there was quite a commotion below stairs. Two little boys were racing through the hall, each one trying to get ahead of the other. Two boyish voices shouted out, loudly and excitedly: "Mamma! Mamie! Kate! who do you think has come in on the morning express? We were just at the depot to see if that box had come from Uncle Richard, and we saw him get off the train. We never stopped to speak to him even, but just ran home as fast as we could skip to tell you he had come. He



looks different, too, but we knew him. He has got a moustache, and his hair isn't long and rough any more, and he's got a gold watch—we saw him take it out to look at the time, and it's a splendid one—and he looks nicer than Arthur!”

All this, in detached sentences, came floating up, first from one boy and then from the other, in wild, excited tones; and the two ladies hurried down to find out who in the world it could be who was such a finished gentleman as to “look nicer than Arthur.”

“Why,” said Brownie, almost choking with his excitement and hurry, “don't you know? Didn't we tell you? Why, Ward, of course, and he's gone on home, and mother'd better hurry, because there's nobody there but Betty Ann.”

This was enough. The ladies hurriedly arrayed themselves for the street, and, followed by all the children, went to the house on Rose street as fast as their feet and a street-car could carry them. Sure enough, there was Ward—a manly-looking fellow, indeed, with a heavy brown moustache and merry black eyes. He was glad enough to see them, too, and caught each one of them in turn in his big arms and gave them a characteristic hug; after which he stalked out to the kitchen, and searched the cupboard for cookies and pie with all his old appetite. How much good it did them to see him, the once unpromising boy with the dusky eyes and the sullen face, developed into this charming, intelligent young man full of plans for a useful manhood!



"Haven't come home to stay this time," he said, munching his cooky with all his old-time relish. "Just took a notion to run back and see Hal married. Wait until I get through my lecture-course and am admitted to the bar, and then you'll see. I've got it all planned out."

But what it was he would not tell.

The wedding was a very quiet one, no one being present except the special friends of the family; but it was a happy and a joyous one. The congratulations were somewhat tearful, to be sure, but hearty and helpful; the refreshments were elegant, and everything was most hopeful and cheery.

And so the young couple started out on the untried sea of married life, their little barque rocking upon the buoyant waves, and gliding swiftly on toward the great and trackless waste of waters beyond the sight of human ken. Trusting in the presence of the Comforter, and in the matchless voice which once commanded the storm-tossed waves to silence, they filled their sails and set out for distant heathen lands.

"Outward bound!" May their life be peaceful, and may they bring to Jesus the wealth of a multitude of saved souls!

Surrounded by prayers like these, Harold and his wife set forward upon the voyage of life.



## CHAPTER XL.

### *GOLDEN SHEAVES.*

SEVERAL years have passed away, quiet, uneventful years, full of busy labor and diligent study. Mrs. Belmont still lives in the house on Rose street; but her silvery hair and rather feeble steps announce the fact that she is travelling the last stages of the journey of life. Her life is a very serene and quiet one, spent in much meditation, with the Bible upon her lap; in winter, before the study fire, and in summer, on the porch, where she can gaze into the far-away blue heavens, while she "longs to be there."

Betty Ann still remains with her; but there is little to do now, for the boarders have been a thing of the past for a great while, and the sewing-machine is seldom in use any more. The truth is, Ward has been the acknowledged head of this household for some years, is still an unmarried man, and more especially "mother's boy" than any of the others. He is one of the most popular lawyers in Oakland, and is ever the willing and able advocate of the poor and oppressed. His heavy logic and withering sarcasm, coupled with the truth, which he never fails to drag from its hiding-place and to unravel, have a way of tearing in pieces the arguments of his opponents, and he seldom loses a case; so that "if Belmont undertakes it, the whole business is sure to succeed," is the general expression of the "men about town."

As soon as ever he was free to establish him-



self in business, he came back to his old home, put up his sign, took his stepmother's wearing labor out of her hands, sent Clyde to college at his own expense, and declared that he himself should never marry while mother lived. He is perfectly devoted to her; brings her the loveliest and choicest of hot-house flowers during the dreary months of winter, when she is shut in, and the freshest literature; and twice a week, in fine weather, he drives her out in a carriage and takes her to call on her old friends. His interest in the church has increased with the passing of the years, too; and his earnest work in the Sabbath-school class and his enthusiastic interest in the Young People's Society make him known as a tower of strength in the Grace-Street Church. Besides this, he has a pet project, which his mother helps him, with all her mind and heart, to carry out. This is the gathering of the boys of the streets, one evening of each week, into his own home, where he makes them happy by means of music, innocent games, magic-lantern views, and light refreshments. He carries in his pocket a little note-book, and whenever he meets one of these social tramps, he takes it out, stops the boy, shakes hands with him, inquires his name and residence, puts it down in his book, and gives him a cordial invitation to attend his Friday-evening club. They do not all come, of course; some ridicule the idea of "Lawyer Belmont winning a hard case out of court"; but a great many do come, and Ward has had the supreme satisfaction of rescuing more than one or two young men from the power of street associations, and of guiding them into the assembly of the saints.



Harold and his wife are still in China, building up the worship of the "unknown God." They now expect to come home within a year or two, and will bring with them a little boy and girl which have been born to them in that far-off land; and, perhaps, if their hearts will allow, will leave the children with grandma and Aunt Kate, that they may receive an American education.

Mamie has a position as music-teacher in the female department of the Oakland University. She has grown into a brilliant and accomplished young lady, a leader in social circles, and a devoted worker in the cause of temperance. Her strong Christian influence is felt all through the institution; and she often says, in her earnest talks with her pupils, that she owes almost everything to her stepmother's untiring efforts in her behalf. Mrs. Belmont's patient teaching and her determination that Mamie should make the very utmost of the gift with which she was so royally endowed triumphed over the girl's rather indolent disposition. "I should never have known that I had any music in me had it not been for her," said Mamie. "She was such an accomplished musician herself that she found out the melody lying all untuned in my soul, and brought it out at once."

Clyde is a gospel temperance lecturer, and is editor and proprietor of a temperance paper called *The Investigator*, in a neighboring city. For a very young man, he is a power and a man of promise.

Brownie is studying railroading, with a view to becoming at some time the driver of one of



those beautiful engines which he has never ceased to admire with his whole soul. His ambition to see the Rockies is not one whit abated, and he seizes every available opportunity to make a little extra money, so that he can go on excursions here and there, and see the world which God and men have made so beautiful.

It is Mrs. Belmont's sixty-sixth birthday—a beautiful, balmy September day. The doors are all open; the hammock is swung between the two great trees in the pretty side yard, and the lady herself is dressed in holiday attire, and is sitting in her cushioned rocker on the side porch, over which the dark green ivy creeps abundantly. Her silvery hair is brushed back in soft waves from her smiling face, and her hands are busy with a basket of fragrant roses, which she is arranging into small bouquets. From time to time she glances up from her lovely employment to look expectantly both up and down the street. Soon there come two little somebodies, bearing between them a little burden. These are Kate's twin girls, Bertha and Blanche. They come tripping in at the gate, and wind their arms about grandma's neck, and give her sixty-six kisses apiece; then they present the basket in due form: "Your birthday gift from us, grandma; and papa and mamma are coming with Stanley in his cab." Then, as grandma opens the dainty basket, and discloses to view a beautiful, frosted, birthday cake, with the figures "66" in gold-leaf in the centre, and surrounded by a wreath of delicate fern, they cry out rapturously: "We made it



almost all ourselves, grandma; and it is just chock-full of fruit—dates and figs and raisins and citron and—oh, everything! And papa said, grandma, that your sixty-six years were just like it—sweet and fruitful.”

For answer, grandma kisses both velvety cheeks, and pins on each white dress a tiny bouquet of roses.

Soon they are all gathered in the old house: Arthur, Kate, and baby Stanley, Clyde, Ward, and Brownie; and lastly, Mamie comes in with a roll of music under her arm; a goodly company gathering around the grey-haired mother. Beautiful gifts are lavished upon her; sweetest wishes for the future are poured out lovingly; and Ward tenderly conducts her to the dining-table, which is abundantly spread for the occasion by their joint efforts. How different from her first reception in that home! I wonder if they think of it now, as they gather about the heavily-laden board, and bow their heads reverently while a blessing is asked, and vie with each other in their attentions to her. If she thinks of it, it is only to bless the divine Giver of every good; and, as she looks upon the golden harvest, it is only humbly to thank him who “giveth the increase.”

“In the morning sow thy seed,  
Nor stay thy hand at evening hour,  
Never asking which shall prosper;  
Both may yield thee fruit and flower.  
Thou shalt reap of that thou sowest;  
Though thy grain be small and bare,  
God shall clothe it as he pleases  
For the harvest full and fair.”

“And some brought forth twenty, some thirty, and some an hundred-fold.”



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